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The Human Sphinx

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE STORY OF A MAN OF MYSTERY
AND A HOUSE OF TRAGEDY IN A QUIET
SUBURB OF NEW YORK

By Ellis Parker Butler

Author of "Pigs Is Pigs," "In Pawn," "Scarlet Hours," etc.

THE day was splendid, as brilliant as a day on Long Island can be, and that is brilliant indeed. The great square house—with its mansard roof, its many wings and additions, and the great pillars of its veranda, which gave it a certain nobility—was glistening white, for it had just been painted. The painters, as a matter of fact, were still at work on the rear of the house. They were working overtime this Saturday afternoon, hurrying to finish the job. John Drane had complained of the paint odor, saying that it gave him a headache.

The Drane place, although it bore no distinctive name, was as good as any in Westcote. Real estate dealers roughly estimated it to be worth a hundred thousand dollars, and pointed to it as an example of

the increase of prices in Westcote. Drane had paid fifteen thousand for it in 1892, and had spent some twenty thousand in improving the place, having the pillared veranda built on, and so forth; so that the whole cost to him had been thirty-five thousand. This was mentioned as a sample of the good fortune John Drane had in all his investments. No one knew just what he was worth, but he was reputed to be worth at least a million dollars, possibly a good many millions.

On this Saturday afternoon he sat on his veranda, just as he had seated himself on his return from his office in the city. He sat in one of the wicker chairs, with a wicker stand beside him, on which he had placed his hat and cane. He leaned back in his chair with his eyes closed, in the at-

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titude of a very tired man. One of the hands that grasped the arms of his chair twitched slightly. It was the slender, aristocratic hand of a man of seventy.

Presently Norbert, the colored house man, came through the door, carrying a tray, on which were a glass of milk, a plate of crackers, a napkin, and several dainty sandwiches. He moved the wicker stand a little closer to John Drane's chair, removed the hat and cane, and placed the tray on the stand. Drane opened his eyes.

"All right, Norbert," he said.

"I'll jus' put this hat an' cane in the hall, Mist' Drane," the negro said. "I thought how maybe you might like them samwiches."

"Perhaps! Perhaps!" Drane said.

"An' Miss Amy say I should ask you is you goin' use the car any more this aft'noon. She say if you ain't, maybe she go ridin' awhile."

Drane dipped a cracker in milk and ate a little without apparent appetite.

"I don't feel well, Norbert," he said. "I certainly don't feel well. Take this stuff away, will you? I can't eat it. I'm not going to use the car. You may tell Amy she can have it. There's nobody come?"

"Only Mist' Carter," the negro said. "Him and Miss Amy is playin' tennis out back on the tennis court."

"Alone?"

"Couple o' young folks."

"Yes. When you go out there, Norbert, tell young Carter I want to see him. No hurry—to-night or to-morrow will do—whenever he has time. And tell Mrs. Vincent to see that the yellow guest room is ready for a guest. I'm expecting a man to stay a few days."

"Yes, sir," replied Norbert, and he took up the tray and went.

He coughed as he reached the door—coughed so hard that he had to pause with the tray resting on a ledge. It was the distressing cough of a man suffering from tuberculosis.

"You want to be careful of that cold of yours, Norbert," John Drane said, as if the cough had annoyed him. "How is Mrs. Vincent?"

"Yes, I'm bein' careful of it," Norbert said, and added, as he opened the door: "Mis' Vincent she's jus' fairly. She ain't no more than fairly—no, sir."

John Drane's fingers tapped the arm of

his chair nervously. He frowned as his eyes rested on the long, tree-studded lawn that ran down to the road. This nervousness was unusual with him. Ordinarily he was so calm and cold, so little moved by even the most exciting events, that in the district surrounding Wall Street he was called the Human Sphinx—silent, stern, unfathomable. Now he seemed disturbed; something had annoyed him.

To the town of Westcote John Drane was not a sphinx. He had settled in Westcote about twenty-five years earlier, a bachelor of forty-five who preferred a home in the country. His purchase of the old house and his considerable expenditures for repairs had been a seven-day topic, and then he had been accepted as a silent man, possibly suffering from a chronic indigestion that made him a little cranky, but not such a bad sort at that.

He took no part in the town affairs that called for mass meetings and service on committees, but he gave with fair liberality when he approved a cause. He received those who came to him on such affairs, and listened to them silently but with keen attention. Sometimes, without a word, he wrote a check. Sometimes he merely said:

"I am not interested."

He took no part in social affairs. As time passed he did become interested in some of the local financial concerns. He became a director of one of the banks, and was a regular attendant at its board meetings; but he was known mainly, until automobiles made horses a nuisance, for his fine horses. His coachman always drove him to the trains and met him on his return, until the time came when he bought an automobile. After that his chauffeur drove him to his office in a building just around the corner from Wall Street on Broadway.

He was not so much a peculiar man as a self-sufficing one. In the deals he made in Wall Street he played a lone hand, never taking part in syndicates, never allying himself with groups. Some of his transactions were sensationally profitable. It was the amazing effrontery of some of these that had attracted attention to him sufficiently to warrant his receiving a sobriquet of his own—the Human Sphinx. He would not talk of his deals, or of the market, or of anything. The moment he reached the city he was, for all practical purposes, mute.

It was not long before Westcote knew

that he was a rich man. Solicitors for a new hospital, going to John Drane in the hope of getting him to give a few hundreds of dollars, or perhaps a thousand, came away from the house with a check for an even hundred thousand. There had been no wasted words.

"Yes, I approve of it; I will give you something," he had said, and, turning to the desk, he had written the check.

The solicitor, glancing at it, had thought it was for a thousand dollars, and had been profuse in his thanks. Not until the check was turned in to the treasurer was it discovered that it was for the amazing hundred thousand. The check went through the bank and was paid without question.

"Well, the bony old son of a gun!" exclaimed the treasurer of the hospital. "He must have a heart in his dried-up carcass after all, even if he don't look it!"

At seventy John Drane was still as bony as ever, but "dried-up" did not describe him, nor had it ever. He was thin almost to emaciation, but it was a soft thinness. His skin was not dried or leathery, and his face had not so much wrinkled as fallen into jowls and folds. His cheeks were drawn down below his cold gray eyes, and when he removed his eyeglasses the hollows below the eyes were almost ghastly; but even at seventy he was minutely careful of his body and dress, almost dandified.

He shaved twice a day, once in the morning and once at noon, for he had a complete shaving outfit at his office. In a small dressing room there he also changed his linen at noon. He could not bear soiled linen. He was a tall man, or his thinness made him seem tall.

As one of the nondescript black taxicabs of the town entered his driveway, he rose from his chair.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, and then frowned, for a second taxicab had followed the first.

II

THE two cabs, following the wide sweep of the drive, one cab close on the wheels of the other, drew up before the veranda, and their doors opened simultaneously. The passenger in the second vehicle—a small man all in black—alighted quickly and glanced toward John Drane. The millionaire, still frowning, raised a finger and touched his lips—a gesture so brief that it was hardly observable, but the man in black nodded to show that he understood.

The passenger in the first cab had some trouble in alighting. He was a huge man, broad of shoulder and hip, and he was trying to bring with him a huge yellow oil-board suit case, in size proportioned to himself. He had the awkwardness of a man not accustomed to the frequent use of cabs. When he finally stood on the gravel, his face was red and perspiring, and he wiped his forehead with the back of his hand before he dug into his pocket for the cab fare.

"Black my cats!" he cried. "Come mighty near never gettin' out of your shebang, son! Half a dollar, hey? 'Tain't bad; here's a dime for you."

He picked up his suit case and turned to the steps.

"Well, black my cats!" he cried. "You durned old Johnnie Drane! If you ain't just as bony and skinny as you was when we was kids! Well, now who'd have thought I'd ever be shakin' hands with Skinny Drane away down East here, on the front porch of a regular blamed old palace like this? How are you, anyhow, you old rascal? Good old Skinny Drane! Well! Well! Well!"

"Simon, I'm glad to see you," John Drane said, taking the fat man's hand. "Leave your luggage there. My man will take care of it. It's good to see you again, Simon. I never see any one from Riverbank—none of them ever come East. Yes, it's good to see you!"

He turned to the smaller man in black.

"Dart," he said, "I'd like you to meet an old friend of mine, a man I haven't seen for—how long is it, Simon? Twenty-five years?"

"Black my cats, John! It's thirty-five, anyway. I wasn't to home when you was there twenty-five years ago," the fat man said. "I'd gone down to Kansas City to try to find that boy of mine; but you wouldn't remember that, I guess. Thirty-five years!"

"Simon Judd, from my old home town of Riverbank, Iowa," John Drane said, completing the introduction. "And my good friend William Dart," he added. "You've heard me speak of Riverbank, Dart."

"Quite frequently—quite frequently," replied Dart. "I'm very glad to know you, Mr. Judd. Any friend of Mr. Drane's, of course—yes, indeed, I've heard him speak of Riverbank—yes, frequently."

They were interrupted by a young girl

who came hurriedly and merrily around the house, half running, and carrying a tennis racket in her hand. She had evidently expected to find Mr. Drane alone, and had been eager to say something, but now she put it off, seeing that Drane had visitors.

"What was it, Amy?" John Drane asked.

"Oh, nothing!" she said. "It was only about Robert—whether you wanted to see him now, but if you have visitors—"

"This evening, perhaps," John Drane said. "One minute, Amy. This is an old friend of mine—"

"Chum, black my cats, when we were kids, why don't you say, huh?" Simon Judd demanded. "He's afraid to tell how long ago that was, huh?"

"Yes, one of my boyhood chums," John Drane said, smiling slightly. "Simon Judd, in fact. Judd, this is my grandniece, Amy."

The girl gave Judd her hand, and for a minute or two they talked, the girl smiling, and Judd laughing—for no reason but because of his own unfailing good humor. Then, having learned that the jolly fat man might stay for a day or two, she said that Bob was waiting for her, and, after a word of greeting to Dart, she hurried away. She did not like Dart. She had never liked him. She could not imagine what Uncle John saw in him.

Dart stood stroking his gray beard and studying Simon Judd as the big man climbed the veranda steps. From the rear the movements of the man from Riverbank were almost grotesque as he hoisted his great bulk from step to step.

"I think," Dart said, when John Drane turned at the top of the steps, "I'll come back later on—to-morrow, perhaps."

Drane scowled his annoyance.

"Now, don't do that, William," he said. "You know I don't like to have my plans disarranged. You said you would stay the night, and I have counted on it. I want to thrash that matter out with you. Don't be a fool!"

"I only thought, as you had Mr. Judd here—"

"Now, that's just why I want you to stay," John Drane said. "If Sime and I get to talking boyhood days, we'll never go to bed. Don't you see? We'll never stop."

"Can't stop me, once I get started—that's sure enough," laughed Simon Judd. "Talkin's my long suit, and always was,

I guess; but don't you folks let me bust up any plans you've made. If you want to talk, I've got a lot of stuff I've got to read over some time—stuff I come down to New York to get hold of. I been made chief of police back home, John."

"That is interesting—at seventy, too, Simon," Drane said.

"Yes, I guess they got around at last to where they thought they needed some brains," Simon Judd chuckled. "Folks do, sometimes. Yes, sir—made me chief of police of Riverbank, sure as you're a foot high!"

William Dart had come up the steps, and had taken one of the wicker chairs. He put his elbows on its arms and began revolving his thumbs, leaning forward and looking off over the lawn.

"Yes, sir, John," Simon Judd continued cheerfully. "All my life I been tryin' one thing and another, but you can't discourage a good man. Sooner or later he's goin' to find out what he's made for. There was one time I tried preachin', and for a while it looked like that was goin' to be it; but I ain't got the voice for it. When I go to let loose, my voice gets squeaky on me. Then I tried the butcher business, but sight of blood always did make me faintish, so I sort of gave that up, too; but I think I got the right thing now, John. Pretty near ever since I was a boy I've had a leanin' toward it."

"Being a policeman?" William Dart asked.

"Crime tracin'," explained Simon Judd, turning toward the little man in black. "Huntin' out who done the crime—what you call detective work. I feel I got genius that way."

"And that's what brought you to New York, Simon?" Drane asked. "Are you on the track of a criminal?"

"Lands o' goodness, no!" laughed Simon Judd, slapping his huge thigh. "Why, I ain't started in yet, John! I don't get my badge until first of the year. No, sir—I come down here to have a look around and see how these New York detective fellers manage the business; and I must say they're right kindly to strangers. They told me a lot of things—gave me a lot of pamphlets and one thing and another. It's goin' to help me a lot, John. I got the genius for it, all right, but I got to brush up on the technique more or less. I guess, though, maybe I'll get along all right."

Norbert, as if knowing what was desired, appeared on the veranda with cigars—long, slender, light cigars of admirable quality. Dart and Drane took one apiece, but Judd hesitated.

"Mostly I smoke a pipe, John," he said. "When I go in for a cigar, I kind of like 'em dark and strong. Well, I don't know—I'll risk one. Now, if you fellers had anything to talk over—"

"We can do that later," said Drane. "Tell me about Riverbank. Not many changes, I suppose?"

"Well, yes," replied Simon Judd, puffing at his cigar. "Say, this ain't such a bad smoke, is it? Yes, quite a few changes, John. Main Street ain't changed much, but out around—you'd be surprised! Say, that niece of yours is a mighty nice girl, ain't she? You didn't say she was your niece, did you?"

"I said she was my grandniece," returned Drane.

William Dart looked up at him suddenly. There was a question in his eyes—and there was fright, too. If he feared anything, however, there was no sign of anything to fear in Simon Judd's face. The fat man was finding unexpected pleasure in his cigar.

"She stay here with you all the time?" he asked.

"She's making her home with me now—yes," Drane answered.

"That's nice! It's nice to have some young folks around," Simon Judd said. "As I was sayin' about the changes in Riverbank—you know that field where we used to go to hunt rabbits—Bailey's field, John? Well, you'd never know it—all built up with houses—streets and all, gas and electric, sewers, everything! You remember little Rose Gertner—her father used to run the Western Hotel? He developed that part of town."

With Simon Judd talking and John Drane asking a question now and then, they remained there on the veranda until dark, when Norbert called them to dinner.

III

ON Sunday mornings John Drane and his whole household slept later than usual, and breakfast was not served until nine o'clock. At that hour, on this Sunday morning, Mrs. Vincent—who for many years had sat at the foot of John Drane's table behind the coffeepot and toaster—

stood in the breakfast room waiting for her employer. She stood near her chair, and she seemed to be suffering, for her eyes were closed, and she held one hand against the small of her back. She was actually in great pain, for she was a diabetic, and at times the pains caused by her condition were almost more than she could bear.

Presently, as no one appeared in the breakfast room except Josie, the maid, Mrs. Vincent drew out her chair and seated herself, ready to arise at momentary notice. Her face was unusually pale, of the hue natural to those suffering from her disease, but she was neatly dressed, as she always was.

"Josie," she said, with considerable effort, "I think you had better have Norbert call Mr. Drane and the other men again. They can't have got up."

"Yes, ma'am," the maid said. "If they felt the way I do, they never would get up."

"You're not so well this morning?"

"Oh, I feel just awful!" the girl exclaimed, almost in tears. "I don't hardly feel like I could drag through the day. I'm that weak, Mrs. Vincent!"

"Your heart again?"

"Yes, like always, only last night it pained me worse than ever it did. It was something terrible, Mrs. Vincent."

"I don't know what's the matter with us—all sick like we are," the housekeeper said. "You better tell Norbert."

The girl went to find the negro house man. She returned almost immediately.

"He's got one of them awful coughing spells again," she said. "I guess I'll have to go myself, and I don't feel hardly able."

She looked at Mrs. Vincent, but that poor woman was suffering.

"I guess you'll have to go, Josie," she managed to say. "I've got to save myself for breakfast. Mr. Drane don't like it for me to be away from breakfast."

The girl went.

On the veranda—for it was there the small family gathered before breakfast in nice weather—Amy Drane was sitting on the arm of a chair, looking through the pages of the huge Sunday newspaper. She had just opened wide a double page of brown illustrations when she heard a piercing scream from the floor above and the fall of a body to the floor.

She threw aside the paper, and, swinging open the screen door, ran up the wide stairs. In the hall Simon Judd, trousered, but

coatless, and with his suspenders hanging, was coming down the passage from the yellow guest room as hastily as his huge bulk could move. At the open door of John Drane's room the girl Josie lay stretched on the floor, unconscious.

Amy Drane was about to bend down to raise Josie's inanimate body when her eyes glimpsed her uncle on his bed, and she stood white and speechless, petrified with horror. The old man lay with his head thrown back against the pillow, his glassy eyes staring at her. The front of his pyjama coat was sodden with blood, from a spot over the heart to the bed covers drawn close about him.

"What's the matter?" Simon Judd asked. Then he, too, looking past Amy, saw the dead man. "He's been murdered!" he exclaimed, and Amy felt something huge lean against her back. "Black my cats!" Simon Judd said weakly. "I'm goin' to faint!"

And he fainted, his vast bulk thrusting Amy into the room as he fell across the maid's body.

IV

WHEN Simon Judd returned to consciousness, it was largely because of a sharp pain in the ear. When he tried to move his head, he could not do so. For a moment or two he was unable to remember where he was or how he came there.

Close to his eyes was what seemed to be an enormous black pillar. As his senses returned, it seemed to be a most unaccountable thing—a low black shoe, out of which arose a phenomenally large ankle. When he put his hand to his ear he was no longer in doubt—a foot was standing on his ear. Some one was standing with one heel against his nose and the toe of the other foot on his ear, and he tried to push the latter foot away.

"Lave be! Sthop it, you!" a hoarse voice whispered; but the foot removed itself from his ear.

Simon Judd sat up. He found himself encompassed by skirts, but he backed out from among them and got to his feet.

He was in a group at the door of John Drane's room. Evidently he had been unconscious for only a moment or two, for Amy Drane was still standing in horror on the threshold. Josie still lay where she had fallen, but now there were others peering into the room. Norbert, the colored house

man, was there, and the big foot that had been pressed against Simon Judd's nose was that of the cook, a woman almost as enormous as Simon Judd himself. Behind the cook was a second maid, Zella, with her hands pressed against her cheeks, and Drane's chauffeur was running up the stairs. To him Simon Judd turned.

"John Drane's been murdered," Simon Judd said to the chauffeur. "I can't look at him. I faint at the sight of blood—always did, and dare say I always will. This here girl's fainted, too. Help me get her on a bed somewhere and out of the way, or she's like to be trampled. Here, you!"

He touched Zella on the shoulder.

"You come and get this girl out of her faint," he said. "Where'll we put her?"

"Here—this way," replied Zella, crossing the hall and opening a door. "Miss Amy's room. Let me help you, George. You and me take her shoulders, and he can take her feet. Go easy, George—she's got heart trouble."

They carried Josie to the bed in Amy's room, and Simon Judd followed the chauffeur into the hall.

"If you know who the family doctor is, you better send for him," said Judd. "You better send for the police, too. This ain't my bailiwick."

"Yes, I'll do that," replied the chauffeur. He, at least, was efficiently businesslike. "You better not let them touch anything in there, unless he's alive yet."

"I know all that, young man," Judd said. "I'll take hold here. You get a move on!"

"I'll telephone," the chauffeur said, and started for the stairs; but the cook took his arm.

"George! Ain't it awful? Ain't it just awful?" she cried.

"Mighty bad, Maggie," he said; "but don't you get excited about it. You keep calm. You don't want to fetch on another of those spells of yours. You better go down and take a—take a drink of water or something."

"Yes, I'll be doin' just that," she said. "It's turrible, George—a murder right in the house! Who done it, d'ye think?"

"We can't tell that yet. Come on, if you want me to help you down. I got to phone the doc and the police."

Simon Judd turned toward the murdered man's room. He put his hand over his eyes to hide the dead body from his sight.

"Now, you see here, Miss Amy," he said. "You better go downstairs a while until the doctor comes. That man of yours is sending for him—and for the police. There ain't nothin' to be done until they come."

"No, nothing to be done!" she wailed. She broke into sobs and threw herself against Simon Judd, weeping tempestuously on his shoulder. "He was all I had!" she sobbed. "He was so good to me. He was so kind to me!"

"There, there!" Simon Judd comforted her. "I know just how you feel, girl. You cry all you want to—it won't do you a mite of harm. All of you keep out of that room!" he ordered. Then he spoke to the weeping girl again. "I don't feel right comfortable about that hired girl we put in your room. I heard the other one say she has heart trouble. I don't know but what you might help in there some, if you feel up to it."

"Josie?" Amy asked. "In my room? Yes, I'll go to her."

She wiped her eyes and hurried across the hall. Simon Judd looked after her.

"There's a real kid," he said to himself. "If that girl's a flapper, she ain't flapped none of the common sense out of her yet, anyhow!"

He looked at those remaining at John Drane's door.

"Say, look here!" he said suddenly. "Where's that other feller—the man with the whiskers? What did John say his name was—Dart?"

The housekeeper turned.

"Mr. Dart? Yes, sir. Why, I don't know where Mr. Dart is. I made up the blue guest room for him. Mr. Drane said he was going to stay the night."

"I left him down there in the parlor, or whatever you call it, when I come up to bed," Simon Judd said. "They had something to talk over, seemed like. I guess maybe they talked late. Maybe he ain't up yet."

"Norbert, see if he's in his room," Mrs. Vincent ordered.

The negro went. He came back at once.

"No, ma'am," he said. "He ain't in his room. His bed ain't been slept in. I guess he got so mad—"

He stopped.

"You guess what?" Judd demanded.

"I said mad," said Norbert. "What I mean is, I've got this cough on my chest,

and I been takin' medicine for it. The doc give me a medicine for to alleviate the cough, and he says take a swaller whenever the cough comes upon me. Last night I leaves the bottle down there; so when I starts to cough I go downstairs to get my bottle."

"What time was it?" Simon Judd asked.

"Well, I don't rightly know. Maybe one o'clock, maybe two o'clock. I ain't look at no timepiece—I jus' starts down. When I get on the steps, I hear Mist' Drane and Mist' Dart talkin' together, and Mist' Dart he surely is mighty mad about it—yes, sir! Swearin' and cussin'—yes, sir—mighty mad! So I don't go down. I comes up."

"What were they talking about?" Simon Judd asked.

"Now that I don't know," said Norbert. "I ain't listen to 'em. It ain't none of my business what gentlemans talk about. I jus' comes up."

George, the chauffeur, came up the stairs.

"I got Dr. Blessington," he told Simon Judd. "He'll be right out. I got the police station, too. They're sending men."

In fact, the police officers arrived almost immediately, the local headquarters having telephoned to the station near by. They came, two of them, on popping motorcycles, which they parked alongside the veranda, and entered the house together. From the top of the stairs Simon Judd bade them come up.

"No one been in the room?" one of the officers asked, as he saw the group at the door.

"No one," Simon Judd told them. "Not that I know of, anyway."

He told of having heard Josie's scream, and of coming at once from his room. The officers entered the room.

"Looks like murder, Joe," one said.

"Sure is murder," the other replied.

"Looks to me like a case for Brenny."

"Yes—he ought to get on it right away, too. You better go down and phone headquarters. I'll stay here. This man's dead, all right. Anybody sent for a doctor?"

"One's coming," replied Simon Judd.

"We're going to have Brennan on this case, most likely," the officer said. "They hand him most of these murders these days. He's a good one. He'll clear this up in no time, if there's any clear up to it. He's the best man we've got on Long Island. Who's that?"

It was Dr. Blessington entering the house. He came up the stairs with a small black case in his hand.

"In here?" he said, and entered John Drane's room.

Below, the second officer was telephoning to police headquarters.

"Ah, good morning, officer!" the doctor said to the man in John Drane's room. "Murder, is it? Too bad! This sort of thing is getting altogether too common. You might ask these folks to go downstairs. We'll just close this door."

"And all of you hang around down there, see?" said the officer. "There'll be questions to be asked."

"Come, we'll go down," said Simon Judd. As Amy Drane came from the room where Josie lay, he stood back to make way for her. "She doin' all right?" he asked. "That's good! The cop wants us to go down and wait. The doctor's in there."

They went down. The servants went into the dining room off the hall and waited there, and Simon Judd and Amy went out on the veranda. The girl sat twisting her hands, saying nothing, now and again wiping her eyes. When the doctor came downstairs, she did not rise. She held her handkerchief over her quivering mouth.

Dr. Blessington came out on the veranda and set down his black case. His face was drawn into serious lines, and he was frowning heavily.

"You are Mr. Drane's niece—his grand-niece, I believe?" he said to Amy. "And this gentleman?"

"Why, I'm just a feller that knew John when he was a boy," explained Simon Judd. "Him and me used to play together back in Riverbank, Iowa, long before he ever come East. I'm East on a sort of business, and I telephoned old John yesterday, just for old time's sake, and he said to come out and see him a day or so."

"How long is it since you saw him last, before yesterday?" Dr. Blessington asked.

"Thirty-five years," said Simon Judd.

"That is a long time. He is greatly changed since then, isn't he?"

"Well, yes," Simon Judd admitted. "Yes, John had changed quite a bit. Just as bony as ever, and so on, but a lot older."

"Would you have known him if you had not known he was John Drane? Would you have recognized him, for example, if you had happened to meet him on the street?"

Simon Judd rubbed the back of his head thoughtfully.

"Now, that's a hard one, doc!" he said at length. "I might have, and I might not have. Maybe not—it's been so blamed long since I saw John last. Why, what are you getting at, anyway?"

Dr. Blessington turned to Amy.

"I wanted to tell you this myself, Miss Drane," he said, "for I know it will be a shock to you. The man up there in the bed, the murdered man, the man we have known as John Drane, is not a man at all. He is a woman!"

V

DR. BLESSINGTON'S announcement did not shock Amy Drane so much as cause her amazement. The shock had come when she faced the blood-stained body of her supposed uncle; and her mind was still so dulled by that shock that she did not immediately grasp what the doctor was telling her.

"A woman? Uncle John was a woman?" she repeated gropingly. "But that—that couldn't be, you know! Why, he's always been a man! I don't know what you mean, doctor."

"The murdered person in the bed upstairs there," the doctor said, "is—or was—a woman. I am merely stating the fact. I thought you should know it immediately, as you are, I understand, the only relative here."

"I don't understand it," Amy said. "Why, it's dreadful, isn't it? Oh, it is horrible! It's like some frightful nightmare! It doesn't seem as if it could be true, any of it!"

"It is only too true," the doctor said. He looked at the girl with keen professional eyes. "You don't feel that this is too much for you? The shock and the strain must be considerable, but you seem a normal sort of person. What I mean exactly is that if you feel too nervous over this, I can give you a simple bromide until your nerves recover from the shock."

"No, thank you," she said. "I think I'll be all right."

"Are you going to be here for a while?" he asked Simon Judd. "I suppose you will," he added with a slight smile, "considering the circumstances, and considering that the police will have to be finding a murderer. Just keep an eye on this young lady, will you? I'll leave my card

—it has my telephone number. If she seems to be about to flop, just send for me. Not," he added, "that I think you'll have to. Have you any one, by the way," he asked Amy, "who could stay here with you for a few days? I'd suggest that you should go elsewhere, but I have a notion the police will want you here, at least until they've done some questioning."

"I'm not afraid to stay here, I think," Amy said. "No—Mr. Judd will be here, and I won't be afraid. I'll have Mr. Carter stay here during the daytime."

"That's Bob Carter?" the doctor asked.

"Yes. He's—we're great friends. I expect him to come this morning."

"You've not had breakfast yet?"

"No—I was waiting for it when—when I heard Josie scream."

"Well, my prescription for you is that you should go in now and eat a good breakfast. That will help you more than anything I could give you. As for the things to be attended to in such a case as this, you may leave them to me. What is your name?" he asked Simon Judd, and Judd told him. "Mr. Judd, I'm sure, will act for you as far as necessary. There can be no funeral," he added, to Simon, "until the law has gone through its formalities. However, if I might just speak to you a moment or two."

Amy, as she had been advised, entered the house to try to eat a breakfast. Dr. Blessington led Simon Judd to the far end of the veranda.

"The funeral arrangements can all be attended to later," he said. "It was not that I wanted to speak about. As soon as possible I will get a proper death certificate, and I suppose William Dart is the man Miss Drane will want to have. He is an old friend of Drane's—of the dead person. He is one of the few close friends the dead man—or woman—had, I think."

"Hold on, now!" Simon Judd said. "Wait a minute, now! Is that the little feller with the beard that was here last night?"

"I don't know that he was here last night."

"Dart—William Dart—that's the name. Old feller about seventy years old or so, ain't he? All dressed in black—that the man?"

"You have described him."

"Well, black my cats!" Simon Judd exclaimed. "I was tryin' to think what that

feller looked like, and all I could think of was an undertaker. He is one, is he? Well, now, maybe we won't want him after all. I don't know but what maybe he's mixed up in this some way, doc. I don't want to keep trade away from any friend of John's—or whoever it is up there—but you might give me the name of another funeral man while you're about it."

"Later, if necessary," the doctor said. "There will be ample time. What I wanted to urge was that you should keep your eye on this girl. I don't want to alarm you needlessly, but until we know more about this affair it is best to try to be safe. What I mean is that we don't know yet that this murder is not the work of a maniac—perhaps a maniac here in this house. If one murder has been done, another may be attempted. Probably there is nothing in the idea, but keep an eye on Miss Drane. Don't let her be another victim, Judd!"

"I'll look out for her the best I can, doc," Judd promised. "You can bet on that! She's a nice kid, this Amy is. But how about this thing being a murder all so sure? You talk like you knew it wasn't a suicide."

"It was no suicide," said the doctor positively. "There are good reasons for knowing it was not. The blow that drove the knife into the heart was a far more powerful blow than that elderly woman could have struck. Death was so instantaneous that a suicide could not have withdrawn the knife from the wound; and, finally, there was no knife in the room. It was murder—no doubt about that, sir!"

"Ain't that a shame, now?" Simon Judd exclaimed.

"When this man Brennan comes," the doctor continued, "you can tell him I will be back in an hour or so. I have a call I must make now. You had better get some breakfast yourself. You're likely to have a long and hard day."

Dr. Blessington turned away, but Simon Judd called him back.

"What I don't get, doc," he said, "is how you didn't know this was a woman all the while. You're the family doctor, ain't you?"

"That's rather peculiar, too," he said, frowning a little. "I am the family doctor here. I have a larger bill here each month than with any house in Westcote. I'm called here again and again; but I've never been asked to so much as feel John Drane's

pulse or look at his tongue. The man—or woman—has never been sick, or, if she has, she has never called me. The servants have had all my attention, and plenty of it, too."

"That colored man sure has a bad cough," said Simon Judd.

"They're all sick," said Dr. Blessington. "I never knew such a houseful of sick help. It's as bad as a hospital. I don't see how a person could bear to have so much sickness around; but John Drane—or this woman who pretended to be John Drane—has certainly been good to them. I've never known her to discharge a servant for ill health. She's had me here twenty times a month. She was a good woman, even if she did choose to masquerade as a man."

"Well, I've read of such doin's before," Simon Judd said philosophically. "I don't know that I blame some of 'em for wantin' to wear man clothes and let on they're men. Sort of queer, though, somehow!"

"It is queer," said the doctor. "It may prove to be queerer than we imagine."

VI

DICK BRENNAN, the detective, arrived by that universal vehicle, the taxicab, while Amy Drane and Simon Judd were at breakfast. As he turned from the cab, after having slammed the door, he cast his eye over the Drane house, registering certain salient features:

"Three story mansard-roofed house—painted white—veranda full width of house in front—fluted pillars, approximately six feet in diameter, supporting the third floor mansard projection—"

His brain registered physical objects in this way—a result of his innumerable appearances on the witness stand against criminals whom he had tracked down. A silver watch was never a silver watch to Brennan—it was "one white metal watch, hunting case No. 1,249,563, fourteen-jewel movement No. 985,003." For Brennan no one ever stood on the corner of Elm Street and Grand Avenue—he stood "on southwest corner of intersection of Elm Street and Grand Avenue." For Brennan gold was "yellow metal" and brass was "yellow metal." It was not for Brennan to decide which was which—not on the witness stand.

In no respect, except that he resembled thousands of detectives, did Dick Brennan resemble a detective. He resembled no one in particular except himself.

"I know that man!" you were likely to say to yourself, when you saw him. "No, I'm wrong," you would correct yourself. "I know some one who looks very much like that man."

You say this of the clerk who waits on you in a grocery, or of people resembling the clerk who waits on you in a grocery. Dick Brennan's face was so much like thousands of other faces that it was hard to remember. Not infrequently this was of value to him in his work. A man who so nearly resembled many other men could easily make himself look unlike himself.

He might be described as a dark-complexioned, serious-looking, medium-built sort of man, such as you might find behind the counter in a good fish market, or in a bank, or collecting tickets on a railroad, or doing anything whatever.

His face and figure, however, were but a small part of Dick Brennan's success as a detective. He knew criminals. He not only knew hundreds of criminals personally, including a hundred or more stool pigeons, but he knew the criminal mind. He knew, with amazing certainty, what a criminal would do in committing a crime and after committing a crime. He was an amazingly successful detective, and had to his credit thousands of indictments.

Now and then Brennan got a case that led to some sensational and spectacular result; but for the most part his work was as unsensational and methodical as that of an electric meat chopper. A crime was fed in at one end of his day, and a captured criminal came out at the other—the day, however, sometimes being a week, or a month, or a year. Often Dick Brennan was "after" ten, or twenty, or forty criminals at one time. As he went along, when the time was ripe, he gathered them in.

In hundreds of cases the criminal was wholly impersonal until Brennan arrested him. He was the "drug sellers," or "those housebreakers in the Westcote district," or "a lot of Wops have begun carrying guns again." Brennan went out and got them.

Standing on a corner, he would see one anemic and shifty-eyed youth passing a folded paper to another. His eye, glancing across the street, would see a rough fellow climbing the step of a trolley car with a lump under his coat tail, while across the street a man came from a flat with a bundle under his coat. The result would be one dope seller, one pistol toter, one house-

breaker. He did not pick them all at once. Sometimes he let them ripen a little, but eventually he got them. He deserved his reputation as a good detective.

Dick Brennan was forty-two, but he did not look more than thirty. For twenty years he had been picking up criminals. He had never "studied" crime, but the ways and habits of criminals had soaked into him. An understanding of their probable actions and reactions had become instinctive in him.

This was one reason why he was so valuable. Another reason was that he had a brain that was able to recognize the times when a criminal was not acting according to rule. He could think when he had to.

Brennan was not particularly annoyed because he had been put on this case on a Sunday morning. He had planned to see a football game that afternoon, but his chief purpose had been to pick up a couple of pickpockets there, if they were still working the football crowds, and a murder promised to be more interesting. He followed the circular drive to the veranda, glancing past the house toward the back, where the drive curved farthest. Mounting to the veranda, he rang the bell. Norbert, the colored house man, came to the door.

"I'm the detective assigned to this case," said Brennan, without any flourish. "The body upstairs or downstairs?"

"Upstairs, sir—yes, sir," Norbert assured him. "Two cops up there. You can go right on up. Should I take your hat, sir? No—you goin' take it with you. Right up these stairs—yes, sir!"

At the head of the stairs one of the officers greeted him with—

"Hello, Dick!"

"Hello, Joe!" returned Brennan.

"Mean piece of business this is, Dick," the officer said.

"Stabbing, is it? What was that about it being an old lady?"

"Yes—Dr. Blessington made the examination. Victim dead several hours. Cause of death, stab wound to heart. Suicide theory untenable, Dick, because the old lady couldn't have used so much strength. There ain't no knife around, either, Dick. She's been murdered, all right! Well, the queer part is she's this old John Drane that's been living here, see? He was a she all the time. Wouldn't it jar you?"

"Yes! Hang around, Joe. I'll just take a look or two."

Brennan went to the bed, looked down at the victim of the murder, and, turning, surveyed the room. He walked across the floor and opened the door of the one closet. Here hung many suits of men's garments, on proper hangers, each on its own hook, while a dozen pairs of shoes stood in a neat row on the floor. He stood on a chair and examined the shelf, taking down several hats, looking into each and noting the makers' marks in them. He moved the hanging clothes and tapped on the inner wall of the closet.

His next act was to open the door leading into John Drane's private bath. Here the walls were tiled to the height of a man, and the porcelain tub and the shower were built in. The whole was immaculately white, as were the ceiling and the wall above the tiles. On a glass shelf stood the few toilet articles any man might use—a safety razor in its gold-plated case, talcum, bay rum, and so on. There was no opening out of the room except the door into the bedroom and a narrow window, the lower part of which was in leaded glass.

"Where does this window go, Joe?" Brennan asked.

"Nowhere. Just out. Drops about twenty feet down, Dick."

"Screen this way?"

"Yes—all the screens hooked inside, just like they is."

They were full-length screens of good copper net, each held in place by six or eight hooks.

"The door wasn't locked, huh?" Brennan asked.

"No. This maid Josie come up to call the old lady, and when nobody answered she opened the door and fainted. Door couldn't have been locked. It don't look like the old lady expected to be killed, Dick, does it?"

"Nothing stolen out of here that you've heard of?"

"Not that I know of," replied the officer. "We didn't ask. We waited for you."

"All right!" said Brennan, going to the door. "I'm through here, I guess. You better telephone the coroner, Henry. Joe, look around for a knife or something. You might keep your hands off anything smooth, in case of finger-prints. Reach in under the mattress and anywhere you think a knife might be. Sometimes these killers shove things in under when they get a panic. I'm going down. What did you

say the girl's name was that saw in here first?"

"Josie; but she ain't downstairs—she's in that room across the hall. She's got a weak heart, and they took her in there to bring her to. There's an old dame with her—the housekeeper."

"I'll see them," Brennan said.

His interview with Josie in Amy's room yielded him nothing that we do not already know. The maid could only say that after knocking on John Drane's door several times, and receiving no response, she had opened the door, and, seeing John Drane in his blood-stained pyjama coat, had fainted.

"Anything from you?" Brennan demanded of Zella, the other maid.

"I don't know anything," Zella said. "I was down in the kitchen, along with George—he's the chauffeur—and Maggie Maney, the cook. We heard Josie screaming, and heard her fall, so we come up as quick as we could. She was lying in a faint on the floor, and Mr. Judd, too—"

"Mr. Judd? In a faint?" Brennan asked. "Who's Judd?"

"He's a visitor—a friend of Mr. Drane's, I guess. He come last night and stayed over. He saw the blood and fainted."

"He reached the room before you did?"

"Yes, but after Josie, didn't he, Josie? Josie was first, then Miss Amy came—"

"And who is Miss Amy?"

"The grandniece like of Mr. Drane—of her we thought was Mr. Drane," Zella explained. "Him and her was the family—the rest of us was just the help."

"Then Josie was the first to open the door, Miss Amy was the first to follow her, and then this Mr. Judd came. Who else after that?"

"Norbert—he's the colored house man; Mrs. Vincent—she's the housekeeper; Maggie Maney, the cook; George, the chauffeur; and then I came. We stood at the door, but nobody went in."

"And about when was this?"

"Around nine o'clock—maybe five or ten minutes after. Mrs. Vincent sent Josie up because breakfast was ready and Mr. Drane hadn't come down yet."

"Every one else had?"

"No—not Mr. Judd and not Mr. Dart," replied Josie.

"Dart? What Dart?"

"The undertaker man," Zella explained. "He's an old friend of Mr. Drane's, and

sometimes he comes to play cards and stays the night. He always has the blue guest room; but last night he didn't stay."

"Not that I knew it," Josie interrupted, raising herself on her elbow. "I knocked on his door when I came up the first time. That was about half past eight. I thought"—she hesitated—"I thought he answered that time."

"I see!" Brennan said. "You knocked to wake him, and you thought he answered. What did he say?"

"I thought he said, 'All right—yes,' or something like that. Then I went to Mr. Judd's room and knocked, and he said, 'All right—I'm up.'"

"On that first trip Mr. Drane didn't answer?"

"No, sir, but I didn't think anything of it. Mr. Drane didn't often have to be called. He always woke up of himself. I thought he was in the bathroom, likely, and would be down. I just knocked on his door, sort of reminding him, and went on. With the others I waited for an answer, because they were guests, and guests ain't sure."

"And the second time you came up you got no farther than Mr. Drane's door? You fainted there?"

"Yes, sir—that's it."

"Show me these two guest rooms," Brennan said to Zella.

The second maid went with him, first to the yellow room, which Judd had occupied, and then to the blue room with its untouched bed. Brennan looked around the rooms without much care; but on his way to the stairs he called the officer named Joe, and told him to look into the two rooms carefully.

Zella went back to Josie, and Brennan went down to the lower floor.

VII

As Brennan reached the lower hall, the screen of the front door was pulled open, and a young man, his face betraying his excitement, came in, letting the screen slap shut behind him. The young fellow was almost breathless, and his face was red from hurrying. As he saw Brennan, he stopped short.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "I know who you are—you're the detective! I saw you when our house was robbed, and I was before the grand jury to tell what was stolen."

"Yes—you're Robert Carter," Brennan

said simply. "Seven, three, four Beech Avenue. You made a good witness. Your man went to the pen. You a friend here?"

"Yes—Amy," replied young Carter, reddening more. "We're—we would have been—engaged. I just heard of this awful business, and I came as soon as I could. Is she—"

"Eating breakfast, I shouldn't wonder," Brennan said. "Go right in, if it's the usual thing, and you want to. I've been put on this case, and I'm looking it over a bit."

"If there's anything I can do—" Carter suggested.

"No—never mind that now," Brennan said. "I'll take it up with you if I need to. I want to talk to Miss Drane next, and you can help me most by steadying her down if she's excited at all. Tell her I'm out here on the porch and will see her whenever she's ready. No hurry. Let her take her own time. Tell her it's nothing to be afraid of."

"That's fine of you!" Carter said, putting out his hand impulsively.

"Brennan is the name," added the detective, shaking Carter's hand. "Trot along now."

Bob Carter found Amy and Simon Judd just finishing their breakfast and about to rise. Mrs. Vincent, at her end of the table, had eaten nothing, merely sipping tea, and her face showed that she was still in great pain.

Impulsively Amy rose as Carter entered, and he was holding her in his arms before he was aware he had intended to do any such thing.

"Oh, Bob, Bob! Isn't it dreadful?" Amy cried, as he tried to comfort her. "If I didn't have you, I wouldn't know what to do!"

"Well, you've got me all right, honey," he said. "Don't you take it so hard. It's bad enough, but you want to buck up. No good in letting it get you too hard. We'll stick it out together!"

"It's so good to have you here, Bob!" she said, wiping her eyes again. "I don't mean to break down. I'm trying not to."

"That's the idea!" Carter agreed. "Now, look here, honey—there's a detective fellow out there wants to talk to you. Just don't let it worry you—that's all. He's a nice sort, and won't be rough. We needn't go out until you're ready. He says he's in no hurry."

"I'm ready now, Bob," she said. "You'll come, Mr. Judd?"

"Sure!" cried Simon Judd readily. "Surest thing you know! Detectives are the thing I want to see. I'm going to be one myself."

"Well, you'll see a good detective when you see this Brennan," Carter said. "None better."

"That's the kind I want to see," said Judd.

They went out to the veranda. Brennan rose as they appeared.

"Miss Drane," he said. "And this would be Mr. Judd? My name's Brennan, as Carter has probably told you. I've been put on this case. I've got to ask some questions of you, Miss Drane; but if there are any you don't care to answer in a crowd, we'll leave them until later. No—you men need not go; I'd rather have you here. The young lady is less apt to be nervous. Let's sit down. We may as well make ourselves comfortable."

They drew the chairs closer together.

"I've had the officers make a search of three rooms up there," Brennan said. "Mr. Drane's room—we'll call him that, or call her that—and the room Mr. Dart was to occupy, and your room, Mr. Judd."

"Suits me all right," Simon Judd agreed heartily. "Anything you do suits me. I'm going to be a detective myself, and the way you do it is what I want to see."

"We'll talk that over later, then," said Brennan, after a glance at the huge Westerner. "I don't suppose, Miss Drane, we'll find anything in those rooms that will mean anything, although a man can never tell. I've talked to Josie and got all she could tell me, and Zella has told me her story. You, they say, were the second person to reach Mr. Drane's door. Just tell me why you went there and what you saw."

Amy, folding and refolding her handkerchief, told what we already know.

"Yes—nothing in all that," said Brennan. "Now, have you personally any reason to think any particular person killed—" He pointed toward the house.

"No—not a reason—not the slightest reason!" Amy declared with absolute positiveness. "I can't even imagine why any one should want to kill my—uncle."

"And, as far as you know, there was no one in the house last night but your uncle, Mr. Judd here, Mr. Dart, and the servants?" Brennan asked her. "I know," he

added, "that you can't say whether others may not have come in unknown to you."

Amy's eyes turned to Bob Carter.

"Yes, I was in the house last night," said Carter.

"About when, Carter?" asked Brennan.

"Late," replied Carter; "after eleven and before twelve. Mr. Drane said he wanted to see me. He sent Norbert to tell me so yesterday afternoon—just before we went for the drive, you remember, Amy? There was no hurry, Norbert said; either last night or to-day would do. I knew what he had on his mind. I had asked him if I could marry Amy, and he had put off answering me. Last night I happened to pass here, and I saw the lights in the library; so I came in."

"Ring or knock or anything?"

"I went to the library door at that side of the house and knocked on the door, and Mr. Drane let me in," Bob said. "Mr. Dart was with him—no one else. I said good evening to Mr. Dart. Mr. Drane said that we would go across the hall to the dining room for a few minutes, and we did. There's one thing I ought to tell you, I guess—just as we were going out, Mr. Dart said, 'Now, remember what I told you, John—I don't approve.' It was something like that. He may have said, 'I'm against it,' or 'I won't have it.' I was rather excited, you see; what Mr. Drane was going to say meant such a lot to me."

"Naturally," agreed Brennan. "Well?"

"That's about all," Carter went on. "We went into the dining room, and Mr. Drane talked to me for a while—mostly about my prospects, and what I was planning to do with my life, and whether I would be willing to come to this house to live after we were married—Amy and I. He said we had best travel for a year, or stay elsewhere a year. After that he wanted us to live here. I told him that was just what Amy wanted. The only reason she hesitated about marrying was that she did not want to leave him; so he said it would be all right."

"I'm so glad, Bob!" Amy cried. "I'm so glad to think he was willing!"

"And then what?" Brennan asked, seeing that Carter was hesitating.

"Well, it was rather queer," Carter said, blushing. "I thought it was rather queer then, but it doesn't seem so queer now—not when we know what we know now. He asked if he could kiss me."

"He did?" Brennan exclaimed.

"Not quite so brashly as all that," Carter said. "He laughed and laughed, and said that he supposed, if we were French, we would kiss each other on both cheeks. I said I had been kissed when I was given my cross. 'Then you won't mind if I do kiss you,' he said, and he kissed me. I felt—well, I felt sorry for him. 'Poor old fellow!' I thought. I knew nobody around here cared much for him, and he was getting pretty old. That was the sort of feeling I had; and now, too, when I know he was a woman!"

"It's bound to come out now and again," said Brennan tersely. "A woman can only stand so much without affection. The very worst I've ever known came to it now and again. And then what did you do?"

"We talked a few minutes about when the wedding might be, and I said I would have to leave that to Amy. Then he said—"

Carter hesitated for a moment, but Brennan did not speak.

"He spoke about money," continued Carter. "He said he had made his will in Amy's favor, and he was leaving her everything he had. Then he told me she was a good girl. He said very nice things about her. He told me he meant to give her a hundred thousand dollars the day she was married, if I did not object. I have nothing of my own, you know. He said that he thought, living in his house and having to be mistress of it, Amy should not be compelled to ask him for money—money for the extra expenses he meant—for the things I could not pay for. I didn't see anything wrong in that. I didn't see that it had anything to do with my loving Amy. Amy knows it's not anybody's money I care for. Then we shook hands and I came away."

"Through the library again?" Brennan asked.

"No—Mr. Drane let me out by this door."

"So you didn't see Mr. Dart again?"

"No—I went down the driveway and walked home."

"You haven't any idea what it was Mr. Dart wanted Mr. Drane not to do?"

"Not really," Carter said. "It may be they had been talking over Amy and me, and Mr. Dart didn't care for me enough to have me marry Amy. Mr. Drane and Dart were old friends—what they call

'cronies,' almost. It may have been giving Amy so much money in a lump that Dart objected to—I don't know."

"But your impression was that Mr. Dart referred to the talk you were about to have with Mr. Drane?" Brennan asked.

"That's what I thought," Carter admitted. "In fact, I hadn't any doubt of it. I thought to myself, 'What business is it of his, anyway?' I don't like him much, somehow."

"And now, Miss Drane," Brennan asked, without a pause, "have you ever seen anything that made you suspect that your uncle was a woman?"

"No," Amy replied without hesitation, but she immediately changed her answer. "Never while he was alive," she said. "It never entered my head—not in the very slightest; but now I can see things. He was so kind to me!"

"Might not an uncle be kind?" Brennan asked.

"Yes, but not in that way. 'Affectionate' is what I should probably say. I didn't know, you see—I didn't think—how a man would be, but I can see now, Mr. Brennan, that he was more like—more like a mother in the way he—in the way he kissed me and smoothed my hair."

"Have you any reason for thinking he was your mother?" Brennan asked.

Amy stared at him with wide eyes.

"Uncle John my mother?" she gasped, and put her fingers to her lips, as if in fear. "Oh, he couldn't possibly be my mother! He—"

"You knew your mother?" Brennan asked. "You see, Miss Drane, I don't know any of the facts, and I have to ask for them. Did you know your mother?"

Bob Carter frowned with annoyance that Amy should be annoyed. He looked at her and turned to Brennan.

"I can answer that," he volunteered. "Amy told me all that."

"Let her tell me," said Brennan, but his tone was kindly.

"I never knew my mother," said Amy.

VIII

BRENNAN leaned forward in his chair.

"I'm not digging into this from curiosity," he said. "I have plenty to do without wasting time that way. My job is to find out who murdered this woman who posed as John Drane. There may never have been a John Drane—"

"You bet your boots there was!" declared Simon Judd. "John Drane and me was chums, I tell you, when we was boys back there in Riverbank. Regular boys and no mistake, and don't you forget it, mister! You can prove that by me any time you want to."

"There was a John Drane, then," said Brennan. "You knew him."

"And I knew him a blamed long time, black my cats!" Simon Judd exclaimed. "Why, John Drane was born along about when I was, along toward 1853, and we chummed together, thick as thieves, for a long time. Yes, until '83—that was when he went out West. He was thirty then. All that time we hung together, me and John—thirty years, for we was born together, as you might say. Sure there was a John Drane!"

"I was going to ask you a few questions later," Brennan suggested.

"Ex-cuse me for buttin' in!" Judd apologized, with hearty good nature. "Go right ahead, and I'll shut up till you want me."

"I was saying to Miss Drane," Brennan said, "that I am only trying to gather details of the life of John Drane, as he was called here, and matters that might have some bearing on this murder. I know nothing, you understand, and I have to ask questions. You say you did not know your mother—that means she died while you were too young to know her?"

"Yes," replied Amy.

"You're about how old?"

"I'm seventeen."

"Do you know when your uncle—to call him that—came to Westcote?"

"Yes, I remember hearing that. It was in 1892. He bought this house then. He said not long ago that he had owned it for thirty-two years."

"And you were not born here?"

"Oh, no!" said Amy. "I was born in California. You see, I'm Uncle John's brother's son's child."

"What did you say?" asked Brennan, turning to Simon Judd.

"I'm not saying a word," Judd said. "Ex-cuse me! I forgot myself."

"But you said something," Brennan insisted. "What did you say?"

"All I said was, 'Which brother?'"

"Well, which brother was it?" Brennan asked Amy, showing a little impatience for the first time.

"It was Daniel," replied Amy. "Daniel

went to California, and married Mary O'Ryan there. They had one son—Thomas Drane, who was my father. He married Amelia Gartner, but just after I was born they were drowned in a flood. Some river overflowed, and they were drowned. Grandfather was dead then, too, and grandmother had died before that; so I was put in an orphanage, and that was where Uncle John found me."

"He went to California? When was that?"

"I wasn't a year old," Amy said. "It must have been in 1908. Uncle John said he had always corresponded with father, and when the letters stopped he was worried. He wasn't well that year, and he thought California might do him good. It was in the winter. He went West for the two reasons—he wanted the warmth, and he wanted to find my father. He found only me."

"And he brought you East?"

"No—not right away. He found a home for me there, with lovely people who were always good to me. They raised me. Uncle John used to send them money for my expenses, and he wrote me letters—"

"You have some of the letters? They're in the same hand that this Uncle John writes, or did write?"

"Yes, exactly the same—a big round hand," Amy said. "So then, when I was old enough, I was sent to a school near Pasadena. I stayed there until I finished, last year. Then Uncle John had me come East. He wanted me to live with him, he said."

"She told me all that," Bob Carter said.

"Yes—it was not a secret," Amy said.

She waited for Brennan to ask his next question.

"Can you tell me anything that would throw any light on this murder?" he asked.

"I don't think so," Amy answered. "I may think of something, but it's all so horrible still!"

"You don't know anything out of the way about this William Dart?"

"No, nothing. He has been Uncle John's friend for a long while—since long before I came here," Amy said. "They have played cards together many evenings."

"Never quarreled?"

"No."

"You've not noticed anything queer about the servants?" Brennan asked, after a moment.

"Do you mean that they were sickly?" Amy asked.

"Are they?"

"Yes—I think they are all sickly. I don't know why Uncle John had such sickly servants, unless it's because he was so kind-hearted. Dr. Blessington is here nearly every day, and some one of them is always in bed. It makes it very hard for Mrs. Vincent, the housekeeper, but I'm afraid she's the sickest of any."

"But aside from that you haven't noticed anything queer in them—anything you might call craziness, any mania?"

"Oh, no—never anything like that," Amy said.

"You don't know of any enemies your uncle had?"

"No—he never spoke of any."

"He had business in New York, hadn't he? Had an office there?"

"Yes," replied Amy. She told Brennan the address, which the detective jotted down in his notebook. "He was a speculator, I think. He would wait and buy a great lot of some one kind of stocks, and then they would go up, and he would sell. I think he made a great deal of money that way. I don't really know much about that. They can tell you more at his office. His manager there is Rufus Lodermann. He's quite an old man, and has been with uncle for a long while, I think."

Brennan jotted down this name in his notebook.

"Who else is there? You don't know? No matter—I can look that up," the detective said, putting his book in his pocket again. "I think that is all I have to ask you now, Miss Drane, unless you can tell me something about the servants—who they are, and where they came from."

"I think Mrs. Vincent, the housekeeper, can tell you more about that," replied Amy. "I've never paid much attention to that. I've always felt that I wasn't wanted to interfere. Mrs. Vincent had been here quite a while when I came, and uncle was old and liked to have things as they were. He didn't seem to want to have me do anything but enjoy myself."

"But you were always ready to do your share if anything turned up," said Brennan, smiling. "I can see that, Miss Drane."

"Of course," Amy said. "It wasn't that I didn't want to."

"Mr. Drane just didn't seem to want

you to bother with the servants, and the household affairs, and so on—that was it, wasn't it?"

"Yes—he never said much, but that was what I felt," she replied.

"I'm trying not to be unpleasant, asking so many questions," Brennan said, "but this whole thing is queerish, as you understand—John Drane being a woman, and being murdered in this way. I have to get into my head the best picture of the household as it was—the best picture I can. How was your uncle about money?"

Amy wrinkled her brow, trying to get the meaning of the question.

"Do you mean with me?" she asked. "He paid me an allowance, always on the first day of the month. It was fifty dollars while I was at school, but when I came here he gave me a hundred dollars a month. I haven't used nearly all of it. I asked him what I should do with the rest, and he told me I could put it in a savings bank, so I did. The house expenses he settled with Mrs. Vincent—once a month, I think. I've heard them going over the bills. He seemed particular about them."

"He was a woman," suggested Brennan, "and household bills were in his line, possibly. Did he keep much money in the house? Had he a safe here? Did he bring securities home, do you know?"

"No, nothing like that. He almost always used checks."

"Any jewelry?"

"He never wore jewelry at all—not even a ring."

"There was a scarf pin," Brennan reminded her.

"Yes—that was all the jewelry he had," Amy said.

"I thought perhaps, as he was a woman," Brennan explained, "he might have had a woman's usual liking for jewels. Suppose we see Mrs. Vincent!"

IX

BOB CARTER volunteered to find the housekeeper. While the young man was on his way, Brennan lighted a cigarette. He leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, and looked out over the lawn.

"You come purty near bein' a first-class detective, don't you?" Simon Judd asked, hitching forward in the chair that he filled to overflowing.

"I'm not the worst in the world," Brennan said. "There are better. We have

some fine men over in New York. Our men are a lot better than we're given credit for being. We have lots of crimes, and we don't get every crook, but it's a bad mess over there. I do well enough. It's not as bad here as it is in Manhattan."

"That's so—that's likely," Simon Judd agreed. "We ain't got it near as bad out to Riverbank. If you was out there, you wouldn't have much trouble at all, I reckon."

"There are tough problems everywhere," Brennan said. "Any place may turn out a hard problem at any time."

"That's how I think about it," Simon Judd said. "That's why I kept pesterin' them out there until they said they'd make me chief of police. 'Black my cats!' I says to them. 'There ain't no tellin' when you're goin' to need fust-class detective ability.' I guess," he chuckled, "they don't think overly much of me, at that. Think I'm some sort of fat old fool, mostly; and I don't know but what I am. There ain't no fool like an old fool, is there? What you think? Am I a fool to go takin' up detectin' as a life work when I'm along past seventy years old?"

"I'll reserve my opinion on that, Mr. Judd," Brennan smiled. "I can't remember any man who took up investigative work at that age, but I've known some men who took up crime when they were as old as that, and who did quite well at it."

"A detective has to be slicker than a criminal—that's the pest of it," Simon Judd said. "It's blamed hard for them folks to take a fat man serious out there to home—especially a man that's mostly clung to jobs where he could sleep most of the time, like livery stablin'. I clung to livery stablin' as long as I could, and that's a fact, but these here automobiles has given the business a black eye, and if a man goes into the garage business he's got to be lively and wide awake all the time. Now, a detective—in a town like Riverbank, Iowa—"

"Can sleep most of the time," laughed Brennan.

"That's the idee!" Simon Judd chuckled. "Particular if he's not on the force. If he's just a policeman, he's got to be out and around, but if he's chief of police, and a detective, he's got to spend quite a lot of time in meditation—sittin' in his office, in a chair tipped back against the wall, with his eyes closed. Looked like a good job

to me, so I got shut of my livery stable and pestered the life out of 'em until I got me this job, startin' January next."

"Good job!" smiled Brennan.

"Yes, or I wouldn't have wanted it," said Simon Judd; "but the main thing, when a man hammers down a job like that, is to be able to hang on to it, and that's why I figgered I'd come East here and learn the detective business from A to Z. I says to myself, 'If I can get them slick New York detectives to let me help hunt up some murderer or something, I'll learn a lot. Then, when I come back and catch a couple of crooks right here in Riverbank, the folks ain't never goin' to let nobody throw me out.'"

Brennan looked up at the old man's face suddenly, but all he saw was good nature and smiling cheerfulness.

"This murder occurred very opportunely," Brennan said.

"That's what I was goin' to say," Simon Judd replied. "Just like it was made to order for me. It couldn't have been handier. That fetches me to what I'm goin' to say—what would you say if I was to go sort of partners with you, and the two of us together was to hunt out who done this crime?"

"We're always glad to have any assistance we can from any source whatever," Brennan told Judd.

"Yes, I reckon you would be," said the fat man. "Only that ain't just exactly my idee. I want you should say we'll work at this case together, so's I can get the inside of how you fellers go at it. What say to that?"

Once more Brennan looked Simon Judd in the face. What he sought was the eye of an insane man—the eye of a man who might have come to this house and murdered John Drane to make a case worth solving; or, perhaps, the eye of a man who had held a grudge against Drane, and had come here to satisfy it. What he saw, if he could judge, was the keen eye of a man who was not such a fool as he looked—the keen, laughing eye of a man who perhaps was laughing at the detective good-naturedly while laughing at himself.

"This," Brennan said to himself, "is a man who is laughing at me because he knows something I don't know!"

"I won't be no more trouble to you than need be," continued Judd. "Only thing is, it would be quite an experience to me

to work hand in arm, so to say, with a real detective like you are."

"I think we can manage it," Brennan said.

"Black my cats, that's fine!" exclaimed Judd. "Amy, that fixes that fine! I'm goin' to pitch right in and work at this thing until we get it all cleaned up and the murderous person put right where he ought to be. Fine! Now, first off, girl, you go up to my room, and, if them officers has got through rummagin' in my baggage, fetch me down a notebook I've got in my valise up there. It's a black one, Amy, without anything wrote in it yet. I didn't know whether real detectives used notebooks or not, but I see Brennan does, and I want to do this thing right. It's right down in the bottom of the valise, Amy."

As the girl went into the house, Simon Judd looked after her. When he saw that she was gone, he drew closer to Brennan.

"Now that you and me are in cahoots on this business, partner," he said, "we want to start off clean and clear, and no favors. What I know you want to know. If not, nothin's no good; and there's somethin' wrong here right at the start."

"It being—?" Brennan asked.

"The girl—Amy, here," Judd whispered.

"She ain't what she says she is."

"What do you mean by that?" Brennan asked. "You mean she's crooked?"

"Oh, black my cats, no!" Judd exclaimed. "If I know folks, she's the straightest sort there is—and the nicest, too. She ain't this late John Drane's niece, nor yet his grandniece—that's what I mean. You heard her tell that rigmarole about John Drane's brother Daniel goin' to California in '78, and marryin' a Mary O'Ryan, and havin' a son Thomas that was this Amy's pa? And about this Thomas Drane marryin' some Amelia Gartner that come to be this Amy girl's ma? Well, black my cats, it's all true except none of it! There wasn't no brother Daniel—no, sir! I take my oath to that. I knowed that Drane family as well as I know myself, and there wasn't no Daniel in it. That's all lies!"

"Are you sure of that?" Brennan asked.

"Why, listen!" said Simon Judd. "This girl got the story from John Drane. John Drane told her this Daniel Drane went West in '78. In '78 John Drane was twenty-five years old, and him and me had been chums since we was born. Never a day we didn't see each other. I was at

their house more than I was at my own. I knowed them from A to Z; and there wasn't any Daniel Drane, I tell you. There was just two kids in the family—John and his sister, Ella Drane, and I knew them both all the time."

"He made up this story to tell the girl," said Brennan.

"Because he was a woman," said Simon Judd, "and hadn't no children to love and cherish. He was 'she,' mind you, Brennan; and when she—this John Drane, whoever she was—got along oldish, she had to have some child to love. If I ain't an old fool and guessin' wrong, she went out there to California, picked out some orphan child somewhere, and told a lot of lies—just to have a kid to come back here and love her when she got too old and feeble to fuss with this Wall Street stuff and so on."

"This may be mighty important, if it is true," Brennan said. "It might account for the murder—some connection of the child, her father perhaps, wanting money, or something along that line."

"It's true," Simon Judd insisted. "Why, look here, you! This old woman, this John Drane, made it all up. Take the names in the story. Mary O'Ryan was a girl we both knew out there in Riverbank when we were all kids. She died out there only last year. Daniel—she had a brother Daniel, this Mary O'Ryan did. Amelia Gartner, that was said to be Amy's ma—she was another kid we both knew in Riverbank when we were kids together. She's alive yet, out there, and she had a brother Thomas—that gave the notion of a Thomas Drane. You go out to Riverbank, and you'll find that's all the solemn truth. You go out to California, and I bet you don't find any trace of a Daniel Drane, or of a Mary O'Ryan his wife, or of a Thomas Drane, or of—"

"Hush!" Brennan said. "The girl is coming."

X

AMY returned with the notebook for which Simon Judd had sent her. Almost immediately Mrs. Vincent came out, leaning on the arm of Bob Carter. The housekeeper had been resting on her bed, being in great pain, and had been obliged to put on a dress before she could answer Brennan's summons. The poor woman seemed to be in a very bad state indeed, but she did her best to answer the detective's ques-

tions, and her answers were full and quite circumstantial.

She was a widow, she said, and had been employed by the supposed John Drane for five years. He had personally engaged her as housekeeper at an employment agency in the city, where she had registered. His offer had been a great relief to her, because it had been hard to find a position on account of her poor health. He probably would not have taken her, she said, except that for two months the house had been without a mistress, the former housekeeper having died. The wages were all she could have expected.

She said, furthermore, that she was a widow, and her account of her antecedents was such that Brennan could easily look up the facts. Mr. Drane had always left the household expenses to her. At the beginning of each month—about the 7th, to be exact—he had given her a check for the estimated expenses. If the expenses ran higher, he gave her extra money; if they ran less, he made the next check smaller. He was very particular in checking the bills with her, but they had never had any quarrels. He was always fair.

Never, said Mrs. Vincent, had she had the slightest idea that "John Drane" was a female. He was peculiar in some ways, but no more so than other people. She considered him a finicky old bachelor. His shaving twice a day, for instance—which she now saw was in order that his lack of a beard might not be noticed—had seemed to her merely one exemplification of his "old-maidishness."

Very few people came to the house, Mrs. Vincent said, although the young folks began to come after Amy's arrival. Mr. Drane liked that, and encouraged it, telling Mrs. Vincent to do all she could to make the place pleasant for them.

Mr. Dart, the undertaker, had been the most frequent visitor, often coming to play cards and staying the night. He had used the blue room so often that the servants usually called it "Mr. Dart's room." Personally she did not much like Mr. Dart. He was inclined to be "uppish" when Mr. Drane was not present. By "uppish" she meant "bossy," she explained, for he acted as if he thought he had a right to order the servants around. He never acted so when Mr. Drane was there, of course. Mr. Drane always had a way with him, and knew how to keep people in their places.

All the servants, Mrs. Vincent thought, were decent and reliable. She had personally looked into their references when they were engaged.

"Mr. Drane," she said, "got them from the hospital."

"You mean he took the hospital employees away from the hospital?" Brennan asked her.

"Oh, no, indeed!" Mrs. Vincent exclaimed, as if afraid Brennan might think ill of John Drane. "It was quite the other way, sir. Mr. Drane took a great interest in the hospital, you see. He helped build it and all. That was one of the few places he ever went at night—to the meetings of the hospital board. The hospital, you see, sir, can't keep chronic patients but so long—a couple of weeks, maybe—and then out they must go, and where to go very few of them know; so Mr. Drane took them. That is why they are all so sickly, one way and another. It was easy work here for them, with almost no family, and Mr. Drane always wanting them to rest when they were ill. The hospital people would let him know when there was a case that could work but was incurable, as you might say. Ah, sir, so many of them never did get well!"

"Died, you mean?" Brennan asked.

"Yes, sir. Dr. Blessington can tell you," the housekeeper said. "There's no house in the town where he comes oftener, nor where that man Dart comes oftener, the more pity it is!"

"The undertaker?"

"That same," Mrs. Vincent said. "If I may say so, sir, I think it was for that reason that he made up to Mr. Drane so persistently. It's not a nice thing to think, and I'm ashamed to think it, but there have been a great many funerals from this house, and no expense ever spared." Mrs. Vincent wiped her eyes. "Just when you get to like a person, it's another funeral, it seems—like Norbert, the poor fellow! I've a great fondness for him, even if he is a black, for he is a good man, Norbert is; but he hasn't long to live."

"Great Heavens, what a house!" Brennan exclaimed.

"Yes, there were times when I felt it was lugubrious," said Mrs. Vincent, shaking her head. "It was not cheerful, knowing that those under me would almost surely die and make place for others, who would die in their turn."

Brennan glanced at Simon Judd. The fat man was listening with his eyes closed, but he was not asleep. He was slowly rubbing his plump hands back and forth across his enormous paunch.

"I think that will be all, Mrs. Vincent," Brennan said. "Send me Norbert next, will you?"

XI

WHEN Mrs. Vincent had gone, Brennan sat for a few moments tapping the veranda floor with his toe and frowning. He turned to Amy suddenly.

"This isn't pleasant for you," he said, "and there is no need of your listening to it. It is only what you know already, I imagine. If there is anything else you'd like to do, you need not stay."

Bob Carter took her by the arm.

"He's right," the young man said. "Suppose we go and sit in the summer-house for a while! We've enough to talk over ourselves, Amy."

The girl arose and went with him.

"What do you make of all this, partner?" Brennan asked Simon Judd. "It's queer all through, don't you think? It sounds to me as if this John Drane woman was crazy—slightly touched in the head, anyway. An alienist could give it a name, I suppose. When a woman masquerades as a man all her life, and gathers around her a lot of chronic invalids and nothing much else, and makes an undertaker her best friend and chum, she's crazy; or what do you think about it?"

"Well, I don't know as she's been masqueradin' as a man all her life, Richard," Simon Judd said deliberately. "I wouldn't go so far as to say 'all her life'—not yet, anyway."

"Oh, you know what I mean!" returned Brennan. "A long time."

"I don't know as I'd say 'a long time'—not yet," insisted Judd. "For all I know, mister, she may have started in half an hour before I come here. The whole bunch of these folks may be lyin' to me, far as I know. I don't know what they may be tryin' to cook up on us. There's one thing I would like to know, though."

His opportunity to learn it came promptly, for Dr. Blessington drove up to the veranda at that moment, his other affairs having received attention. Brennan, who knew the doctor fairly well, asked him to sit a while.

"I guess you're the very man I want to ask a couple of questions of," said Simon Judd. "This Mrs. Vincent says you've been coming here purty regular right along, and you look like you had a couple of eyes in your head. About this John Drane—is there any time you noticed any special change in him?"

"Change?" the doctor queried.

"As if, up to some time, he was the real John Drane, and from then on was this woman playin' she was him," explained Simon Judd.

"Why, since it is brought to my attention with this mystery in mind," Dr. Blessington said, "there was a time when I noticed a change in John Drane—a shocking change, as I thought it. The time is pretty well fixed in my mind, too. As a matter of fact, there have been two very distinct changes in this John Drane. Just before he went to California, he—or she—was decidedly run down in health—in bad shape, I thought, although I was not asked to advise him. Then he went to California, and, when he returned, he was like, as we say, another man. He was brisker and more cheerful, and had put on quite a little flesh for such a thin man. He walked better and stood better. At that time his hair was dark, but he probably used a dye. The man who went to California may not have been the woman who returned. On the other hand, the change may have been wrought by rest and the warm climate."

"And what was the other change?" said Brennan.

"That was a shocking one," the physician said. "From the time Drane returned from California looking so well, he began to run down again. I did make so bold as to speak to him about it, and he said he knew he must do something. Told me he thought he would go to Hot Springs, and take a long rest. A week later he went, and he was gone three months. He came back with his hair absolutely gray, as it is now, his face emaciated, and his body nothing but bones. Except for one thing I would be willing to state that in my opinion the person who came back from Hot Springs was not the man who went there. That thing is a scar on this woman's abdomen—the scar of an appendicitis operation. My opinion now is that she probably went there for the operation—if that was indeed where she went—in order that her sex might not be discovered by any one who knew her."

"That's a possibility," Brennan agreed.

"She could have changed into women's clothes at some stop-over *en route*," the doctor said, "and changed back into male garments on her way back. If that is the answer, she must have had a bad time of the operation to wear down so tremendously; but it is also possible that the man who left here that time was not the woman who returned here a little later."

Brennan said nothing for a full minute.

"I'm afraid I don't see much in that idea, doctor," he said finally. "There's too much of the improbable in it. The person who returned from Hot Springs—if that was where the person went—was certainly very much like the person who left here as John Drane, is it not so? Enough so that you were not particularly suspicious? Then how could a substitution have been made? Who was this woman who was so much like John Drane that she could come back here and take his place in the house and at his office and in Wall Street, going on with his speculations without creating comment? The thing is incomprehensible. Such a woman must have planned taking John Drane's place for years. She must have learned all about his business to the minutest details, and all about his home affairs here. She must have planned to murder him or make away with him somehow. It is too improbable, doctor."

"You asked me, you know," said Dr. Blessington, a little offended.

"And your answer is perfectly good," said Brennan. "Now let me ask you another question. Did you ever notice anything to make you think this woman was insane—the victim of a mania, I mean? What do you think of her idea of having sick servants and no others? What about her friendship with this undertaker?"

Dr. Blessington turned these questions over in his mind before he answered.

"You understand that I am not an alienist," he said then, choosing his words with some care. "I am only what is called a general practitioner. As one of the hospital staff, I have sometimes recommended to Drane, at his request, chronic patients still able to do easy work, and it never occurred to me that there was insanity in his desire to aid these unfortunate people. To tell you the truth, Brennan, I thought it was fine of him to give them jobs in his house. Even when they fell ill, he saw that they

had the best attention, medical and otherwise. When they died—"

"A good many did die, did they?" asked Brennan, and Dr. Blessington colored.

"You will remember that they were mostly people doomed to die," he said stiffly. "Many of them—most of them—had incurable diseases."

"But they did die," Brennan insisted.

"What I mean is this, doctor—this woman who was known as John Drane had great wealth. If she wanted to help these incurables she could have sent them to sanitariums, and she would never have missed the money. She seems to have liked to have the sickly, the dying, and the undertaker clustered about her. I'd call that morbid, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I might call it morbid," Dr. Blessington admitted. "I wouldn't say it meant that she was crazy."

"Well, I don't know that it makes much difference whether she was crazy or not. She has been murdered just the same, sane or insane," Brennan said. "I'm just trying to get a clear picture of her in my mind. That's all now, doctor. I can get in touch with you again if anything else turns up."

The doctor opened the door leading into the hall, but Simon Judd held him with a question.

"Say, doc," he said, "how long have you known this John Drane, anyway?"

Dr. Blessington pulled at his chin, trying to place an exact date.

"He came here, I believe, in 1893," he said. "It may have been '92 or '94. I first met him that same year, when I called on him for a gift to our hospital. I know that I hoped he might make use of my services if he needed a physician, but I was not called in until two years later—say in 1895. I've been the family physician since then."

"And along back there in '93 and '95 he was just about the same feller he looks as he lies up there on the bed?" Simon Judd asked.

"Yes," said the doctor slowly. "Yes, with increasing age and illness taken into consideration."

"You don't mean to say!" Simon Judd exclaimed. "Well, black my cats! And I dare say it was along about when he called you in that he begun to gather these sickly folks around him, huh?"

"Yes, I think that is so," Dr. Blessington said.

"And when, doc," Simon Judd asked cheerfully, "was the time when he murdered the first of these sickly hired hands of his?"

XII

To say that Dr. Blessington was utterly amazed and genuinely shocked by the brazen question discharged at him by Simon Judd is putting it mildly. He glared at the fat Iowan, but, when he tried to speak, he could only splutter. Brennan himself looked at Simon Judd with smiling curiosity; but as Judd's possible thought suggested itself to him he straightened with a perceptible jerk.

"Murdered!" spluttered the doctor. "I take exception to that word, sir! I—I demand that you explain—"

"Well, black my cats!" Simon Judd said good-naturedly. "You don't have to go flyin' off the handle at me, doc! I ain't said you murdered anybody. It just sort of struck me that maybe this dead lady had been doin' some murderin'. I don't know but what—if I was a female person tryin' to let on to be a male man, and if I had all-fired big reasons for keepin' it dark—I would sort of like to get rid of any nosy hired help that got a notion I wasn't what I let on to be. Seems reasonable to me, some ways. I ain't sayin' you had anything to do with it, doc. Don't think you had, myself. You ain't that sort."

"Why—why—" Dr. Blessington stammered, still too angry to control himself.

"Never mind, Blessington," Brennan said soothingly. "Our friend here is a new hand at this investigating business. He only thought he had found something interesting. Don't let it worry you. Stop as you go out, if you want to talk it over. It's probably unimportant."

But when the doctor had entered the house, Brennan did not act as if he thought the suggestion unimportant.

"Have you seen anything to make you think there has been murder of that sort done?" he asked Judd.

"Now, don't you go payin' too much attention to what I say from time to time, Dick," replied the Iowan. "I'm gabby, I am. Always was an old fool when it come to shootin' off my mouth. Notion hits me in the head, and I blat out like a kicked billy goat. Wouldn't surprise me a mite if I was all wrong about these sick and halt hired hands bein' murdered. It's

prob'ly just one of my fool notions. Doc wouldn't go and bury nobody without findin' out what they died of."

"He certainly would not, if he suspected anything," Brennan said; "but what if he had no reason to suspect? If he saw in a death only the operation of the disease he had been treating? There may be a lot in this idea of yours."

"Pshaw, no!" declared Judd with exaggerated carelessness. "Just the fool talk of a fat old feller that don't know nothin' much. You better forget it, Brennan. Go on and ask some more of the help about things."

"I never forget anything, Judd," Brennan said, but he did continue, as his next step, the questioning of the servants.

By this time the local reporters had word of the murder and began to arrive. Brennan referred the first of them to Dr. Blessington and the officers upstairs, and told Norbert to send any others to the doctor. To have privacy for his further questionings, he went into the library and had the servants sent to him there.

From the servants, however, he was able to draw nothing new. With Simon Judd's murder suggestion in mind he dug a little more into that phase of the life in the Drane home. Norbert said that he had succeeded a house man who had died, and the cook, Maggie Maney, admitted that she had come while her predecessor still lay dead above stairs; but she insisted that she had known the former cook, and that the woman had always been sickly and weakly. The others had followed servants who had gone to other positions as their health improved, or had been sent to sanitariums by John Drane when they became too ill to work.

To get Maggie to say this intelligibly was not easy, for she had been drinking. As Brennan's questioning proceeded, she was alternately angry—shouting her answers at the top of her voice—and maudlinly tearful, her huge body shaken by rather ridiculous sobs. Finally she became so hysterical that Brennan told her he would not bother her more then, for it was plain that she was an apoplectic, and he was afraid she might break a blood vessel if she carried on any worse; but she would not go away.

All Brennan had managed to get from her were assertions that John Drane had been a "heavenly angel, God rest him," and that a poor woman had a right to a

swallow of drink when her heart was broken, and that she could tear the hair from the heads of "them that came sneak-in' an' snoopin' an' tryin' to blacken folk's car-ack-ters!"

"All right, then, Maggie," Brennan told the excited cook. "We won't sneak and snoop any more. You go back to the kitchen and take it easy, and don't let it worry you. Just send the chauffeur in, will you?"

The cook flared up again.

"I'll not have him bulldozed by the likes of you!" she shouted. "All shame to you, stirrin' up strife in the house. Go on about your business an' lave us be, why don't you?"

"Now, be easy," Brennan urged good-naturedly. "I'm Irish myself, and you don't want to get me angry, you know. It would be a terrible row. You just tell George I want to see him here—that's all."

The cook went out, mumbling and growling, but George did not come, and Brennan had to send Norbert for him.

"What got into the stout lady cook, do you think?" Simon Judd asked, while they waited for the chauffeur.

"Some of the worst sort of whisky now being privately distilled," Brennan said, smiling. "I imagine John Drane kept the lady pretty severely off the stuff, and she's having her first real happy time for many a month."

"Black my cats!" Simon Judd exclaimed. "It beats my time how they get a hold of the stuff, with prohibition and all."

"They get it," Brennan said dryly.

Norbert's return cut short further explanation. The house man said that George, the chauffeur, was sorry, but he had gone to bed and didn't think he could bear to get up.

"He says, Mist' Brennan, how the growth in his stomach got mighty bad all of a sudden like, and he ain' able to stand it. Yes, sir—he says how the pain is mighty terrific. He ain' hardly able to stand it, he says; so he took some of the medicine what he's got and went to bed—yes, sir."

"Well, what's the rest of it?" Brennan asked. "I can see that's not all. You've got something else on your mind."

"I was only thinkin', Mist' Brennan," Norbert said, "that if he got a pain or if he ain' got a pain, it ain' goin' be much use

troubled' George right now—no, sir. Seems like he been indulgin' in alcoholic liquor to a very considerable extent."

"Drunk, is he?"

"He certainly has been indulgin'," Norbert said seriously. "I ain' seen a man what has indulged more completely fo' quite some time—no, sir!"

"We'll put George off for the present, then," Brennan decided. "Are there any other servants I have not seen?"

"No, sir," Norbert assured him. "We you has seen is all."

"This George," Brennan asked. "What do you know about him, Norbert?"

The negro told what he knew. Like the others, George—who had the odd name of Firmandick—had been in John Drane's service for some little time. He had been an orderly in the hospital before coming to Drane, and had had an operation for a growth in the stomach; but the operation had not been entirely successful, and the growth had returned. Dr. Blessington said, Norbert told Brennan, that the growth was a serious matter, and would kill Firmandick before very long unless he underwent another operation; but the chauffeur was set against doing so.

The chauffeur, Norbert said, was supposed by the servants in the house to be engaged to marry Maggie; but no one believed the marriage would ever occur, because they did not think George would live to be married. He was too ill when his bad spells came upon him. Norbert said he supposed George had got his liquor from some bootlegger. The servants knew George usually had whisky in his room, but the chauffeur seldom drank it—only when the pain was bad.

Probably, Norbert added, Maggie had got the whisky from George. She ought not to drink. Dr. Blessington said she had a mighty high blood pressure, and whisky was dangerous for her. He had scared her good, Norbert said, when she had a sort of stroke. The doctor had told her she was pretty sure to drop dead if she took much whisky.

When Norbert was gone, Brennan lighted a cigarette.

"It's a queer bunch altogether, Judd," he said; "but you'd be amazed how many queer bunches you'd find in this world, if you mixed around as I do. I see them at their worst, usually, when they are keyed up by some catastrophe, and their eccen-

tricities stick out strong. I think my next job is to talk to this man Dart, our undertaker friend. He may not yield much, but we'll get another angle on John Drane. I have a notion that Dart must have known Drane was a woman."

"Pshaw, now!" Simon Judd exclaimed, chuckling. "You don't mean it, do you, Dick? Why, the old rascal! A hairy old boy like him, seventy years old if he's a day, hangin' around this old lady like he was tryin' to be her husband!"

Brennan snapped his fingers.

"There's an idea!" he said. "There's a lead worth following! If this man Dart discovered that Drane was a woman, he might very well try to blackmail her into marrying him. John Drane was rich, Judd—very rich. We may have the reason for the murder there—Dart trying to force Drane to marry him, to avert exposure."

"Nope!" said Simon Judd. "Nothin' like that, Richard!"

"But why not, I'd like to know?" Brennan demanded, rather amused at the fat man's decided tone.

"Why, black my cats, Dick!" said Judd. "He couldn't want to marry her when he was married to her already, could he?"

XIII

"How do you make that out?" Brennan wanted to know.

Simon Judd chuckled his heaving chuckle again.

"I just sort of suspicion it, Richard," he said. "Seems so to me, so you may say. A feller don't always have to have reasons, does he?"

"In my profession he does," replied Brennan coldly.

"Well, then," said Judd, "how about him comin' to play cards and stayin' overnight quite frequent, Richard? If I was tryin' to figger this out, I'd sort of say, 'John Drane was a woman, and she didn't want it known. If she didn't want it known, she wouldn't be havin' a feller stay overnight much, especially if he didn't need to, seein' as the feller lived right here in town. If she did let a feller stay overnight, it 'd sort of show they was married. If he was tryin' to bulldoze her into marryin' him, she wouldn't want him around, would she?"

"You may be right," said Brennan thoughtfully. "And does your mind tell you how long they had been married?"

"Oh, pshaw, now, Richard!" Simon Judd laughed. "You don't want I should have a head on me that could tell you the day and date, do you?"

Brennan was rubbing his chin, considering this new idea. He did not tell Simon Judd what he was thinking, but it was that if William Dart was indeed the husband of the supposed John Drane, the last will and testament made by John Drane might be of great importance in solving the mystery, such as it was, of the murder. If Drane had made a will leaving everything to Amy, as Amy said Drane had told her he would, William Dart would have been foolish indeed to kill Drane; but if the latest will left a large sum to Dart, and Dart feared the making of a new will, this might be a reason for the murder of Drane by Dart. Coupled with the flight of the undertaker from the house on the night of the murder, all this might mean much.

"You're wrong, Richard," said Judd, interrupting the detective's thoughts.

"Wrong? What about?" Brennan asked.

"You're thinkin' maybe this undertaker feller murdered John Drane, so-called," replied Judd.

"How do you know what I was thinking?"

"Because, black my cats, I was thinkin' the same thing, Richard," Judd explained; "but it ain't so. I don't take no stock in that notion. That little old shrimp wouldn't murder nobody. In the first place, he ain't got the gall to do it. In the second place, I ain't ever heard of an undertaker murderin' anybody. Did you ever?"

"No," Brennan agreed. "I don't remember a single case where an undertaker did a murder."

"Sort of unprofessional, I guess," suggested Judd. "Sort of like buildin' up trade in an unethical way. It ain't done, as the feller says. Are you goin' to telephone him to come here, or are we goin' to his undertakin' shop?"

"I think he'll be coming here," replied Brennan. "Dr. Blessington has probably asked him to take care of the funeral."

"You'd better telephone," advised Judd. "That Dart feller ain't comin' here to take charge of no funeral."

"Why not?"

"Because he don't want to be worried with it," declared Judd. "He don't want a funeral on his mind while he's got to

think what he's going to do and say about bein' married to John Drane. He's got a lot of thinkin' to do, Richard, that undertaker has. There's a terrible lot of questions in his mind right now. He's got to decide whether he's goin' to admit he knew John Drane was a woman, or not. He's got to decide whether he's goin' to admit he's John Drane's husband, or not. He's got to decide when to say they were married, and why he never told. He's a busy man right now, Richard, you bet your boots! He don't want to take no time off to think of no funeral preparations."

"I'll call him up and tell him to come here," Brennan said.

He went into the hall and did so.

"He will be here immediately," reported the detective, when he returned to Simon Judd. "You meet him and keep him down here. I'm going up to see if the officers have found anything new."

XIV

THE undertaker drove his own car at times. He arrived in it a few minutes later, and Simon Judd met him on the veranda. The fat Iowan was standing at the head of the steps as the smaller man mounted, and he pushed his hat back on his head and put his hands in his pockets, jingling his coins and keys.

"Brennan wanted to see me," the undertaker began, pulling off the gloves he wore when driving.

"So did I, Abner," Simon Judd said, grinning at the little man. "I been wantin' to have a good old talk with you ever since we shook hands last night. Been a long time since we last seen each other, ain't it?"

The little undertaker showed no surprise, attempted no evasion. He did not even seem to be annoyed by Simon Judd's words. His only expression was one of worry and weariness combined. He went to a chair, seated himself, and motioned Simon Judd to sit near him. He fumbled at his beard, not knowing exactly what to say.

Judd spoke first.

"I told Brennan you didn't kill her," he said. "I told him you wasn't the sort to do such a thing, Abner."

The information did not seem to cheer the undertaker much. Perhaps he did not rightly hear what Simon had said.

"Sime," he said, "I knew you knew me last night. I was scared last night, Sime!"

"Yeh? Thought I'd got track of some-thin' out home, huh? Why, you poor old feller!"

"When you said you were going to be a detective," the undertaker explained. "Yes, I thought sure you had got on the track of something. You had, hadn't you, Sime?"

"Not a thing!" replied Judd. "I come East, just like I said, to study up how detectives do down here. I didn't suspicion a thing, Abner—not until I saw you; and then I only wondered why you had come down here and changed your name. At that, Abner, I didn't think anything but what I heard back home when you disappeared—that you was bankrupt, and had skipped out."

"I was bankrupt," the undertaker said. "I did skip out. Sime, I never made a decent living at undertaking the whole time I was in Riverbank. It wore on me—wore on my mind; and Ella wasn't a patient wife. She was a nagger, Sime—an awful nagger!"

"Always sayin' she wished she was a man, I bet you!" Simon Judd said. "That kind of woman does wear a man down, Abner, black my cats if she don't! Well, she had her wish."

"She was a terrible woman, Sime!" the little undertaker went on, shaking his head. "I don't know that there ever was another such woman, except where you read about them in books. Sime, I wish you were on my side in this business! I wish I had you, or somebody, to be a friend to me right now! I don't know anybody in this town—not a soul. I'm alone. I'm the most friendless man in the world. She wouldn't let me know anybody. She was jealous—jealous and afraid. I'm all alone, Sime, and I'm scared. I can't think right. My head don't seem to work right to-day."

"What have you got to be afraid of?" Simon Judd asked. "What have you done to be afraid of, Abner?"

"Nothing! Nothing!" the little man said tremulously. "As God is my witness, Sime, I never did a thing but keep my mouth shut. They can't hang me for that, can they? Thirty-two years of keeping my mouth shut! What do you think I ought to do, Sime?"

"Why, if I was you, Abner," advised Judd, "I'd tell this Brennan the whole story, straight and clean. I sure would. Tell you the honest truth, Abner, I'd get

it off my chest and out of my soul just as quick as ever I could."

"I don't know—I don't know!" the little man mourned.

Just then Brennan came down and out upon the veranda. Simon Judd spoke to him, half turning in his chair.

"Come on over here, Richard," he said. "Dart wants to tell you all about it. He knows purty near the whole thing—up to the murder, anyway. Go ahead now, Abner—tell him how it was!"

The little man pulled at his beard, frowning at his feet.

"Hold on a minute!" Simon Judd said suddenly. "We ought to let this Amy girl hear this, accordin' to my notion. Seems like she has a right to know. Ain't it so, Abner?"

"Yes—she'll know it anyway," agreed the little man.

Simon Judd went into the house to send Norbert to find the girl. She came out presently, Robert Carter with her, and Simon Judd told her why she had been sent for. She and young Carter seated themselves, and the girl looked anxiously from face to face; but the undertaker did not speak.

"Amy," Simon Judd said, when the silence had lasted a few moments, "I'm goin' to start this off, because what I know I know. John Drane and me was boys together, born close to the same time, away back in 1853. John was born in '53, and Ella, his sister, dead upstairs there, was born the next year, 1854. That's all the Dranes there was. There wasn't no Daniel Drane—he's fairy story. Who you are I don't know, but maybe Abner here can tell us that. Anyhow, we three—me and John Drane and his sister Ella—grew up together out there in Riverbank. John never got married. In 1883, when he was thirty years old, he went West, and we lost track of him—I did, anyway. What did he do out West, Abner?"

"He got into copper and silver," Abner said. "He made a million."

"He made a million between 1883 and 1892," continued Judd; "but his sister Ella stayed right there in Riverbank, and in 1884 she married a man who came to town and started in the undertaker business. His name was Abner Dart, wasn't it, Abner?"

"Yes, I married her—June 6, 1884," Abner Dart said.

"After a while she got to be a naggy wife," Judd went on. "She bore down pretty hard on Abner, and quinched his spirit till he was no more than a worm. About eight years of that, until 1892, and then John Drane come home to visit her and see the old town. Hey, Abner?"

"He came home sick," Abner said; "and he came when Ella was sick. We carried him up to the house on a stretcher and put him in the bed. Ella got out of her bed and went and sat in a chair by his bed, and they talked—just the two of them. He had had a hard time in the West there. Sometimes he'd gone for days without food, prospecting the hills, with a man named Jarling, his partner. Then they found copper, and it was when they were both pretty well played out. It was a question whether they would either of them last until they could reach civilization. So they drew up a couple of papers—if either of them died, all the other had was to go to the one left alive. John told Ella that as he lay there dying, and then he died."

"That night," said Simon Judd.

"Yes, he died that night," agreed Abner Dart. "So Ella went back to her bed and sent for me, and she told me what to do. You remember old Doc Worley, Sime? He was always drunk. He was drunk when we sent for him, and we got him drunker. He signed a death certificate, and then he ended up that spree with the tremens. The rest was easy enough. You were at the funeral, Sime. You never guessed it was John we were burying when we said it was Ella."

"No, it fooled me easy enough," admitted Judd. "Typhoid was what Ella had had, and they'd cut off her hair, and none of us had seen her since she was took sick. I thought how bad she looked, but that was all."

"So we had John—Ella, it really was—get well," continued Dart. "We had him sick for a couple of weeks, and then we had him get well enough to walk around with a cane, and presently he was well enough to leave town."

"I went to the station with him myself—hauling him in one of my rigs," Simon Judd said. "We talked about when we were kids. I was fooled, black my cats!"

"She went to Chicago, Ella did," Abner continued. "After a while, when she had gathered up the loose ends of John's affairs, she came down to New York and got

settled here. I failed in business, the way we had arranged, and came here to West-cote, and she gave me money to start in again. For a month or two we pretended to be strangers to each other, and then we got acquainted. I was the only close friend she had, and she was the only close friend I had. She began speculating in Wall Street, and did well—she was a wonderful woman that way; but all the while she was worried. That old partner of John's—Jarling—kept her worried all the time. She never could find him—a word of him now and then, and then he was lost. It might be five years or ten years between times. Then she would hear he was alive, and then no more news of him for another long stretch."

"If Jarling knew that the real John was dead, he could claim a million or so, hey?" Judd asked.

"That's what worried her," replied Abner Dart. "She got so she thought more of her money than of her life. And then—"

He stopped and hid his face in his hand.

"She poisoned the first one," Simon Judd supplied.

"Yes, the first," Abner Dart said, so weakly that they could hardly hear him.

"The first was a housekeeper named Caroline Barstell. She was a sickly old thing, and believed in ghosts. She thought she was a medium and had second sight, but she was keen. She was keen the way a fortune teller is when he studies people and then tells them what their past has been and what their characters are. She told Ella right out to her face that she was a woman. That night Mrs. Barstell had a fit and died."

"Ella had poisoned her?"

"Yes—that was the first. That was what started Ella getting the chronic patients from the hospital. Dr. Blessington made no trouble over the Barstell woman's death. He said she had been in danger of death at all times."

Abner Dart was silent for a moment.

"There were nine others," he said hoarsely. "Nine others! When Ella suspected that one of them believed she was a woman, that one died."

Amy had turned as white as the surface of the house behind her. Now she fell forward, fainting. Bob Carter caught her just in time to prevent her from falling to the floor. Brennan ran into the house and

returned with water, and Bob Carter wet her face.

Presently she returned to consciousness. When she was seated in her chair again, and apparently none the worse for her fainting spell, Simon Judd asked Abner Dart a question:

"And who is Amy, Abner?"

XV

BEFORE Abner Dart could answer Simon Judd's question, the silence was broken by cries and loud noises within the house. Brennan leaped for the door and ran inside. For a brief time the noise continued; then it was silenced, and Brennan came out again.

"That Maggie cook was cutting loose," he said. "She has been drinking more, but I took the stuff from her, and she has promised to be a good girl. Did you say who Amy was, Dart?"

"She's a Drane," Abner Dart replied. "Along during these last years Ella complained a good deal because she had never had a child. It bothered her mind. She talked to me about it. She worried because we were old, and there would be no one to leave the money to; and I told her to adopt a child. She used to go away when she was sick. She went to Hot Springs when she had appendicitis. She couldn't let the doctors here handle her illnesses, of course, so she went away. One time, when she thought she was going to be sick, she went to California. She heard of a Drane there, and tried to find him. His name was Silas, but he had died, and his wife had died, and they had left this baby; so Ella adopted it. That was Amy, and that's all we ever knew about her. She was a great comfort to Ella in all these years—especially in these last months."

"Well, black my cats, I'm glad to know there was some good in the woman, anyway!" Simon Judd exclaimed. "Did she make that will she was talking about, leaving the money to Amy?"

"Yes, and she was going to give Amy a fine present when she married. We liked Bob Carter. It was like ending with something clean, after a lot of vileness, to know we would leave these two when we went," Abner Dart said. "It didn't pay, Sime. She made a mistake, Ella did. She wasn't happy, and I wasn't happy. John Drane's money did her no good, and it did me no good. I'd have enjoyed life more just be-

ing a second-rate undertaker out there in Riverbank, burying some old friend now and then, and going along nice and easy."

Amy was weeping now, crying gently. Bob Carter, sitting on the arm of her chair, was trying to comfort her.

Norbert, coughing, came to the door. He seemed to think that Brennan was in charge of the house, for he spoke to the detective.

"If you please, Mist' Brennan," he said, "George Firmandick has jus' gone an' died all of a sudden, an' Maggie is startin' to carry on mighty bad."

"Where is she?" Brennan asked.

"She's up in his room ovah the garage," Norbert said, "an' she won't let nobody come up. She's got hold of a knife, an' I reckon she's gone plumb crazy."

"I'll be out there in a minute," Brennan said. "Have the two officers go out with you, will you? Hurry now! I just want to ask Mr. Dart a couple of questions before I go."

Norbert hurried away, coughing as he went. Abner Dart made a gesture of despair with his hand and his face became sadder than ever.

"Last night," Brennan said, "when Carter went through the library, Dart, you said to Ella—to John Drane, if you please—something like 'Don't do it! I warn you not to!' or 'I'm against it—remember what I say!'—something of that sort. What did you mean by that? Were you warning your wife not to let Amy marry Carter?"

"No," Abner Dart said hollowly. "Oh, not that—never that! We both wanted that."

"Then it wasn't over the marriage that you and Ella quarreled last night, after Simon Judd went to bed?"

"You know we quarreled, then?" Abner Dart asked dully.

"We know it," Brennan said. "Why didn't you stay for the night, as had been arranged?"

For a full minute Abner Dart did not answer. When he did, it was in the voice of one talking in his sleep.

"I'm old! I'm old, and I'm tired! A man can stand so much, and then he can stand no more. I had thought that she was through with her killing, and that we might have a few years of peace and gentleness before we died; but she told me there—in there, last night—that another had to die.

George Firmandick, the chauffeur, had come to believe that she was a woman. She told me last night that he must die before morning, and that was what I was begging her not to do. That was why we quarreled. That was why I went away last night. I told her I was through with her—through forever!"

They were all silent now, staring at the broken little man, Simon Judd pursing his fat lips, Amy as white as a white rose, Bob Carter glaring angrily, and Brennan watching the undertaker's face questioningly. Brennan broke the silence.

"Dart," he demanded sharply, "do you know who killed Ella Dart last night?"

"No! I do not know!" the little man said, shaking his head. "If I knew, I would tell you. I—"

One of the police officers interrupted this time, coming around the veranda, walking firmly on his broad soles.

"Brennan!" he said, motioning to the detective with a finger.

"What is it, Joe?" Brennan asked.

"The cook—Maggie Maney, her name is—had a spell and passed out up yonder in the chauffeur's room just now," the officer said. "I don't know was she right in her mind or not, but she was shoutin' that the dead woman had killed the chauffeur."

She was shoutin' that the dead woman was murderin' all that guessed she was a female, sir, and that last night she saw the dead woman—who was not yet dead, you understand—givin' George some drops, at which time the cook was hid in the chauffeur's closet, I'm sorry to say, sir."

"And—" prompted Brennan questioningly, as he closed his notebook and dropped it into his pocket.

"And the last words the cook shouted before she passed out," the officer said, "was to the effect that she had murdered this late John Drane, now known to be a female, usin' a knife as the implement, the object of the said crime bein' revenge, and the crime bein' actuated by love and affection for the said George Firmandick, now deceased."

"You'd better write all that down before you forget any of it, Joe," Brennan said. "You'll have to give that to the grand jury, possibly."

He turned to Simon Judd.

"I think that's our case," he said. "It's not much for us, but it will be a big story for the newspapers. By the time it reaches Riverbank, you ought to be quite a hero detective, Judd."

"If I ain't," Simon Judd said placidly, "it won't be my fault!"

THE END

WHILE A CLOUD CROSSES THE SUMMER SUN

WHEN leaves have lost the spring translucency
That makes them look like flakes of topaz, garnet, jade;
When every tree,
Save the dark evergreen, begins to fade,
To lose that crisp yet tender quality
Of reverie relieved by mirth,
Then like a slow cloud's shadow there comes over me
A creeping sadness older than this earth—
Sadness too subtle to be caught and laid.

Summer may laugh about me, spend its bloom
With all the largess of a Fortunatus purse;
The bees may zoom
Busy content, the squirrels whiskingly nurse
Illusions that make light of winter's gloom;
But I, less lucky-wise than they—
Born to see only flowering honey in the broom
And in their nimble boarding summer's play—
Brood as if round the corner stood a hearse.

Richard Butler Gloenser

The American Sex

PETER PAGET MAKES AN EARNEST EFFORT TO LEARN HOW TO PLEASE WOMEN

By Frank R. Adams

ANNABELLE McCALLUM'S lion suddenly woke up to the fact that he was only a very clumsy specimen of a jackass. He had stepped back into Annabelle's doorway for a forgotten pair of gloves. The tea where he had been supposed to roar was over, and he had escaped the lingerers. They were still talking on the other side of the velours curtain that separated the living room from the entrance vestibule.

"My dear, if you want my opinion, I think he is positively stupid! Of course I wasn't going to say anything, but when you ask for my out-and-out judgment, why, I can't help—"

"It isn't fair to compare Peter Paget with men like Conway, who is an Englishman and trained to all the fine points of social observance," Annabelle defended loyally. "Peter hasn't cut his social eye-teeth yet; but in six months—"

"I can't wait that long to be amused. Life is real, life is immediate, and Peter Paget is not my goal. Let me know when you are going to invite him again, and let me bring along my own clown."

"If you mean Roy Wilkes, your cabaret bond salesman, you're entirely welcome!"

"Well, you have to admit that Roy can dance like an angel, and that he plays a pretty fair hand at bridge."

Peter Paget let himself out of the door, still minus his gloves. He had heard enough to make him so angry that his hands trembled as he wiped them off on his handkerchief.

His anger was not directed at the carmine-mouthed marionette who had criticized him. He granted her the right to choose her associates by any standards that she might choose to adopt. The person

with whom he was furious was himself, for having obligingly climbed up on the revolving pedestal to pose in the spotlight.

He couldn't blame Annabelle for not knowing that he was not a ladies' man; but he had known it himself all the time, and he should not have stifled his better judgment and let her parade him.

Of course, he was not a wonder at dancing, and naturally he played poker better than bridge. Ten years of prospecting around in Africa and Asia for an American construction company make a man lose sight of the graces that society considers essential. In fact, a great many of the qualifications that women seemed to consider necessary in their male associates had come into vogue since he had gone away. What they appeared to want now was an amateur of phrases, a composer of clever compliments, a parlor sleight-of-hand performer, a man deft with his feet and audacious with his tongue.

No doubt, to be what they wanted took a certain amount of cleverness. It certainly required a lot of assiduous practice. Peter admitted all that; but where did men get time to become vaudeville performers, and still accomplish anything in the line of personal achievement?

It was quite possible to scorn the social system and go back to his work, where his talents were recognized, but Peter did not happen to be that kind of a man. When he ran foul of a problem, he liked to find the tender spot in it and then put his fist there swiftly and certainly.

Besides, he had had enough of work for a while. For years he had been promising himself the relaxation of unworried pleasure. That was one of the reasons why he had made all that money which was repos-

ing to his account in various and sundry banks and safe-deposit vaults.

Also he had immediately run across Annabelle McCallum, who was the materialization of all the dreams of which he was vaguely conscious. Annabelle was better than any yearning expatriate could dare imagine. Peter wanted her—wanted her vibrant, vermilion youth, her bizarre beauty, half Egyptian, half Spanish—or, at least, made up to look like that. He wanted her insatiable gayety, her deft knowledge of the way to play at anything from pinochle to passion.

And Annabelle had been obliged to apologize for him to her friends, because he was not interesting! He would much rather she had said that he was ugly, or deformed, or cowardly, or weak, or vile.

How can a man win a girl if he doesn't interest her?

The answer, as even Peter Paget knew, is that he can't.

II

A YOUNG man in a silk-embroidered lounging robe, slightly frayed, sat in the parlor of a three-room apartment—in which the furniture had been rasped, not mellowed, by time—and smoked the next to the last of his unmistakably Russian cigarettes.

The door behind him opened. He was looking through the window at the distant river, and did not trouble to turn around.

"That you, Stanislaus?"

"No."

The voice was feminine. It spoke English, but English with a certain exotic tang to it.

"Oh!" said the young man, still not looking. "I thought you had gone to Miss McCallum's tea."

"I did start, but on my way to the street car I discovered that my only pair of white gloves was impossible, so I returned. It's rather strange, isn't it, to have only one pair of white gloves?"

"Oh, go without them! Lots of the American girls don't wear them."

"*Chki!*" The woman made a hissing exclamation, ending with a click of the tongue. "Sophia Alexnov does not do many things that American girls do!"

"Oh, very well! Be as aristocratic as you please, but, after all, the war is over, and there is a Soviet government back home which—"

"I notice you do not give up your Krakovna brand of cigarettes."

He sighed.

"I will, beginning to-morrow. This is the last one, and I haven't a sou."

Sophia laughed.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because we are so funny. They call us prince and princess, and invite us everywhere. We can't go, because we have nothing to wear. We can't stay home, because here there is nothing to eat. It is very hard to be poor when once you have not been!"

"Damn these American plutocrats!" The young Russian got to his feet. "They have plenty of money, but don't know how to spend it. There ought to be some way of diverting it into channels which would be of some use to the civilized world."

"We shall never get any of it by sitting still doing nothing. Have you never thought of going to work?"

"Work? I am not fitted for anything. I am not a lawyer, or a doctor, or even a minister."

"No, but you could be a valet, or a butler, or a—"

"A valet? My God, Sophia, an Alexnov a valet? I'll starve first!"

"You probably will. I, personally, am going to cease pretending that I only came to America for a visit. I shall start looking for employment."

"Sophia, I forbid it!"

"Nicholas, you are a fool! Give me that morning newspaper."

He handed her the sheet, and she turned to the classified advertisement section—a part at which neither of them had ever glanced before. Absently she reached toward the box of cigarettes.

"Sophia," wailed the young exile, "that's the last one!"

"So it is." Sophia lit it and settled down to a long job. "I am now the provider in this family. When I earn some money, I will buy you some more cigarettes—American cigarettes—ostriches, I think they are called. I remember reading an advertisement—'I'd walk a kilometer for an ostrich.'"

III

PETER was a man of determination, a believer in direct action. He would never be killed while sitting on the fence. He might be caught on the wrong side, but at least he would always be moving. That's

why, in the morning papers, he had inserted this advertisement:

WANTED—a social trainer to prepare parlor blacksmith for successful battle with society. Write care of this newspaper.

That had seemed much better than buying one of those much advertised volumes on what to do when one has inadvertently stepped on a recumbent garden rake at a lawn party, or has unwittingly invited a prohibition enforcement officer to share one's pocket flask.

Of the persons who replied, he invited three to call upon him.

One proved to be a woman who taught ballroom dancing.

The second was a gentleman whose vocation in the evening was that of paid escort to ladies visiting the city, but who could spend a great part of his daylight time imparting to a cash pupil what he knew about charm.

After meeting these two, Peter decided against both of them. They doubtless knew things that he needed to learn, but he was not impressed by their personalities. Perhaps he expected to hire too much, but at least he wished to respect the person who was to put him over the hurdles.

His man admitted the third applicant. Not hoping for a great deal, Peter came out of his room in a smoking jacket.

He was instantly sorry and apologetic.

His caller was a white-haired lady—forcefully white-haired. You knew at once that her tresses had once been very dark. She was seated when Peter came in, so he could not tell how tall she was, but she made him think that she was tall. At any rate, she was quite erect, she held herself straight in her chair, and she did not loll back, as some women do. Her being seated suggested that it was because it was her regal privilege, and not because of any fatigue.

She was artificial in every detail, from carefully arranged coiffure to smart, foolishly high-heeled boots; but she gave the impression that she had been born that way—that meticulous grooming and even formal facial make-up were, in her life, a symbol of the class to which she belonged. She wore the carmine of her lip stick much as the ladies at the court of Louis XIV wore beauty patches—as an obvious, conventional part of the ensemble.

At that, Peter's experience did not in-

clude any elderly woman who used rouge to any extent. However, his suddenly developed purpose in life was to get used to a totally unforeseen kind of a world. This woman was surely different, and, just as surely, an *habituée* of the new world to which he aspired.

Yes, there was dignity written all over her—dignity, character, and poise. Peter realized, almost with a regretful sigh, that here was a human being who invariably did the right thing—or, if what she did was not right until then, it automatically became so because she did it.

Hers was a strong face—not harsh, but large-featured enough to give room for an unmistakable expression of character. Her mouth was large and slightly square. Her eyes were large, too, but inscrutable. There was almost an oriental slant in them—a fascinating quality.

She had an accent—not much or easily defined, but a flavor in her speech that stamped it as different. Occasionally she paused a little before a word, as if she thought of it first in another language and translated it.

"I am Mme. Quex," she introduced herself. "I am applying to M. Pierre Paget for the first employment I have ever sought in my life."

"Mme. Quex?" Peter repeated, to make sure.

"Yes—at least, that is my name since the revolution in Russia."

Of course it would have been absurd not to arrange with Mme. Quex. To tell her that she wouldn't do would have been like telling the Queen of England to go back and stand in line if she wished to shake hands with you.

Besides, this lady seemed to be exactly what Peter needed—not what he had expected, but obviously better than that. He had a premonition that he would always be a little afraid of her. She certainly made him acutely conscious of his *gaucherie*—even more so than Annabelle and her circle of sparrow hawks; but that, too, was just what he needed. Whenever he arrived at the point in his education where he felt at ease in the presence of his preceptress, he could consider that he had graduated *cum laude* into any stratum of society that he might choose to grace.

"Now, *monsieur*," she said, when the financial details had been impersonally settled, "what kind of a woman is it that you

wish to please? It will help me to know. For some sort of woman one kind of man; for another, something quite different."

"Why do you think that I wish to please a woman?" demanded Peter.

"Because all American men wish to please women."

"American men? Don't you mean all men?"

"No, *monsieur*—most other men wish to have women please them. Perhaps you have been entertained by savage chieftains in the Congo, and have sat in the tents of Arab princes. Did they try to think up conversation to amuse their women?"

"No," Peter admitted, smiling at the picture; "but I can't imagine being so indifferent to the presence of ladies who have votes."

"That is because women are the American sex. There was a mistake made somewhere about a hundred years ago. You men were only playing at being performing bears, but the women took it seriously; and when you woke up it was too late. They had you fastened with real chains, instead of the garlands of flowers you had put on for fun. It is rather a sad spectacle, is it not, that of powerful creatures, once lords of the jungle and forest, dancing clumsily to not even very good music played with a turn crank?"

"*Madame*, aren't you arguing against the dominance of your sex?" Peter suggested amiably.

Mme. Quex shrugged.

"Against our dominance, perhaps; but certainly not against our happiness. Power is not good for us when we get it. We don't know what to do with our dancing bears, when we get tired of their tricks, except to find other bears with practically the same tricks; but I am talking myself out of what you call a job. Perhaps, if I do not hold the tongue, you will decide not to be an amusing man for the ladies."

"No!" Peter decided. "I am committed to my folly. It is necessary to learn how to please women, if only in order to be able to do exactly the opposite."

At this point Mme. Quex showed her first sign of emotion.

"If only you would!"

IV

THE textbooks from which Mme. Quex and Peter Paget taught each other were menu cards, programs, and lists of one

thing and another which may be bought in Manhattan and vicinity, from lingerie to houses and lots.

"No man should be without a discreet knowledge of laces and what not," Mme. Quex declared. "Imagine loving a person who did not appreciate the psychic value of having filet and baby Irish beside the chair of one's bed!"

Peter looked at his preceptress sharply.

"*Madame*, you have a disconcerting way of being naughtily young at times!"

"I can assume it," she admitted composedly. "It is a cloak made from memories that I have saved and woven into a fabric to keep me warm on dull days. Of course, no woman is ever old and wrinkled to herself. We take pains not to see below the surface of our make-up; but you didn't think we imagined that we fooled any one else, did you?"

"To return to the original subject," persisted Peter, "what did you say was the name of that kind of lace which is so infinitely to be preferred as trimming for boudoir furniture?"

She told him.

"But that is only an individual preference. Perhaps the modern girl whom you will love, or do love, does not wear anything so clumsily old-fashioned as lace. I have heard upon reliable authority that there is not much beneath a young woman's frock nowadays except the young woman herself."

"I think," said Peter sagely, "that the woman I love would wear a little lace, if only as a sort of symbol—as one wears a little sprig of holly in one's buttonhole at Christmas."

Annabelle McCallum ran into him on the street one day. She was reproachful.

"Why haven't you been to see me this week?"

Peter was vague.

"I've been busy, and—"

"Not so good!" criticized Annabelle.

"No man is ever too busy to see a woman who interests him. I must have my spark plugs dusted off. Apparently I've lost my kick!"

Annabelle and her conversation were like fresh chilled lettuce, refreshing and brittle. Peter wondered, after having been with her during lunch, why she left him feeling dissatisfied, as if she were only a preliminary to something else.

"Peter," she had accused, "you've changed your line. Either some damned woman has you in her clutches, or else you are deliberately setting out to fascinate me with an assumption of indifference. If it's the latter, I'm obliged to admit that you are doing it so well that you may compel me to marry you in order to satisfy my curiosity!"

If Peter had said, "Will you?" he would probably have found himself a married man before nightfall. As it was, he thought he was being teased—which possibly he was—and he said not a thing. This adds a chapter or two to the narrative.

V

BESIDES, Peter had an appointment with Mme. Quex for that afternoon, and no man who had an appointment with Mme. Quex would break it merely to get married to some other woman.

The fact that he left her without lingering piqued Annabelle more than anything else. She had half a mind to follow and see what he was up to.

Mme. Quex surveyed him critically.

"There is a touch of assurance in your manner which you did not have yesterday," she decided approvingly. "That is a sign that some woman is at present crying her eyes out about you."

"Oh, I hope not!"

"Not necessarily real tears. Have no remorse. She'll get over it. Woman's three tearful emotions are self-pity, baffled curiosity, and frustrated revenge. A broken heart usually leaves us fever-eyed. Now, *mon enfant*, what is our lesson for to-day?"

"Seven things that please a woman."

"Do you know what they are?"

"Yes," Peter returned glibly, and began to recite. "A compliment on a virtue or a charm which she knows she does not possess; an assumption that she understands logical thinking on the part of—"

"*Arrêtez-vous*—halt, M. Peter! Where did you get all this misinformation?"

"Why, I learned it from you yesterday."

"Oh, yesterday! Well, the same things do not please a woman to-day that pleased her yesterday. Times and customs change, but not so fast as women's minds. To-day it pleases a woman to be told she is a beautiful idiot, to be taken against her will for tea to a place she does not like, to be told that she must live in a house that she says is too small, too hideous, and—"

"Get into my car," said Peter, having guided her toward it.

"Where are we going?"

"To the Club Poushla for tea."

"But I detest that impossible imitation of a Russian barroom!"

"Yes?" said Peter. "The Club Poushla, George," he added, to the chauffeur.

When they were finally seated on a wall bench, she smoothed her ruffled feathers.

"You have, *monsieur*, a most incomprehensible audacity!"

"I was carrying out your own lesson."

"The things I say are never to be used against me."

"Why not?"

"I have age, *monsieur*, and austerity. I am not to be bullied."

"Thank you for smiling when you say that!" A square mouth is fascinating when it smiles.

They looked at hideous little houses later, and then Peter took Mme. Quex home. It was quite dark. Ordinarily she left him early, declining his car, and went to her quarters by the Subway.

She said good-by at the curb and entered the building by herself; so when Peter, ten minutes later, having discovered her hand bag on the seat of his car, drove back to the cliff house where she dwelt, he did not know which apartment bell to ring. Her name did not appear on any of the mail boxes.

There was a janitor—a moldy-looking individual who lived behind a jungle of steam and water pipes.

"No such party in the Richmond Arms, boss—no, sir!"

"That's strange!" Then, struck by the thought that perhaps she rented a room from some one else, Peter described her, waving a five-dollar bill, and ending up with—"I think she is Russian."

The janitor clutched at the clew as he would doubtless clutch the reward if he could earn it.

"There is a foreign woman I thought was a stuck-up wop, but her name ain't Quex, and she ain't old. She and a man live together in Apartment 206, but I don't think they're married."

The details did not interest Peter. He paid over the five dollars to be rid of hearing them, and departed. He would give Mme. Quex her bag the next day without any reference to the fact that he had attempted to find her. Apparently she had

wished to keep her address a secret. Probably she lived in some other building, and had merely stopped at the Richmond Arms as a blind.

VI

As was to be expected, Peter eventually learned the essential things that he and his preceptress thought he ought to know.

"No one would ever mistake you for an Italian count, or even an English earl, the assumption of nobility being in inverse ratio to the rank; but you are insolently indifferent enough to compete with the domestic imitation. Yes," decided Mme. Quex, critically, "I think I shall let you go now!"

"But," Peter protested, "I shall miss you fearfully!"

That was quite the truth. Moreover, he rather feared that she needed the money he paid her.

"You won't, as soon as you begin using the infallible tricks I have taught you. They are good ones. I know well, because I have been fooled by them so often myself. Never follow your own heart, don't even try to think, save to remember the things I have said, and I prophesy that your days—and your nights, if you wish—will never be lonely."

She said adieu quite simply and unemotionally. It puzzled Peter. He thought they had become curiously close friends. Theirs was an intimacy based upon acutely dissimilar viewpoints on life.

Yet she was saying good-by, presumably forever, very much as if she were about to step around the corner for a few minutes only. Peter's training in caste was too thin a veneer for him to realize that she would have died in the same casual fashion—that no one would have known that she was suffering any pain.

It annoyed him a little. Peter had thought that the most indisputably "fine" woman he had ever known liked him at least a fraction as much as he admired her.

He let her go in the *tempo* of the scene she had set herself.

"Good-by," he said, and that was all.

Prince Ivan Alexnov let himself into his apartment with an air. As he crossed the threshold, his spirits bounced with his feet.

"Hello, Sophia! Where are you?"

There was no spoken reply, but a sob

guided him to a small heap of clothes and a Russian exile on the dilapidated divan.

"To speak in the American vernacular, how come?" he demanded, seating himself beside her.

"I've lost my job," Sophia responded, without looking up.

"If that's all it is, look up and smile! I've just got one. Behold the new waiter in the Argentine room at the Costmore Hotel! The head waiter said he'd take me on if I'd trade evening clothes with him. *Pouf!* Good-by, evening clothes! Believe me, Sophia, I am what you call 'good.' Put on your hat, and we will go out and eat up my first day's tips!"

VII

PETER PAGET had become a social success. He went around with an air of extreme dissatisfaction with life. That, added to his cultivated indifference, made him an interesting enigma to the women he met. The fact that he, in return, found that they rather lacked the savor of salt did not make any difference in his magnetic pull.

In his wake were strewn many doubting if not broken hearts, owned by women who wondered why he had run by without seeing their block signals. A lot of ladies hated him—hated him, that is, with a hatred which would not have interfered with any one of them being entirely amiable if he had offered to throw a chain around her particular neck.

Peter himself did not know what it was that they lacked; but it was certain that he did not find an indefinable something for which he was looking. Even Annabelle did not possess this elusive ingredient. She charmed but lacked tang.

Still, she was the best of them all. His original judgment had been right, so far as the group from which he had been able to choose was concerned. Annabelle was an inconstant little flirt, avid of any new sensation that the changing world might offer, but she was a red spot in a world of pastel grays and blues, and to parade her seemed the most amusing thing that offered. Moreover, she was Peter's temporary slave, at least.

So they became engaged in an interview from which Peter came away with the sensation of having been doused with cold molasses. He felt quite sure that they did not love each other as, for instance, his father and mother had loved in the days

before his existence. He did not know how he knew, but he was positive that his father's feeling for that far-away girl, his mother, was partly a religion, partly an amused tolerance of adorable feminine whimsy, and partly heart service without critical reservation.

His own more modern love affair seemed to be only kisses and clever conversation. Courtliness was left out. Perhaps he was still too old-fashioned, too thoroughly imbued with the feudal traditions of fealty to the American sex.

Annabelle seemed satisfied with her new toy. Peter had an uneasy feeling that she would have been equally content with the conquest of any proportionately well provisioned masculine citadel. Something was lacking, but Peter did not know what.

When she was in his arms, Annabelle was certainly feminine enough. She knew the physical tricks of loving almost too well. Her kisses were the passionate ones which had been handed down from that Cleopatra whose very coiffure she imitated. Actual contact with her lips inflamed Peter to fever heat, but the memory of them left him cold. His imagination refused to install a stained glass window to illuminate her shrine.

Annabelle decided to announce the contract at a reception. Peter hated the idea of a public parade, but remembered that all this time he had been in training for that very thing; so he submitted without any show of emotion.

He managed to preserve his carefully schooled equanimity throughout a function that blared and whirled about him to the strains of a stringed orchestra, changing to saxophones as the evening wore on. Peter had a pretty fair time in a detached sort of way. Annabelle was glorious, for this discordant turmoil was the soil in which she luxuriated.

Peter had an idea that this announcement reception was a fair sample of what their life would be, up to and including the day when he should finally decide that there was a period of repose awaiting him in Africa. As the evening wore on, he began to think that perhaps that day would come a good deal sooner than he had originally expected.

Then came a lady, a very late arrival, to whom he was presented.

"Princess Alexnov," he heard the introducer say.

At the word "princess," Peter rallied all his social forces. For high nobility—or was it royalty?—he would no doubt be expected to put on an especially showy performance; but for a moment he failed utterly. All he did was to make several false starts, which finally resulted in his saying feebly:

"Hello!"

The princess regarded him with a critical sniff.

"M. Paget, you are a great discredit to your social preceptor, whoever he may have been; or did you never have one?"

Peter rallied.

"You could scarcely expect, princess, that I would not be surprised."

"At what?"

"At meeting you again—here."

"Again? We have met before?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite positive."

"All right, then; but I thought I should never be recognized, or I should not have come to witness your triumph."

"Did you think, princess, that by any possible artifice you could disguise your mouth?"

"My mouth, M. Peter—"

"Thank you!"

"For what?"

"For the 'Peter.' We are still friends, I infer."

"But what is strange about my mouth?"

"It is a most individual mouth, princess, and lovely strains of unwritten music issue from it."

"I don't think I ever taught you to say things like that. You have had some other instructor!"

"No—no one could have taught me that, or any of the thoughts I have had about you since you said good-by to me. I've made them all up myself. Would you care to hear some of the others?"

"If you think your *fiancée*—"

Startled, Peter passed his hand dazedly over his brow. He had quite forgotten Annabelle, in the excitement of having discovered what it was that had made him so restless of late.

Annabelle could not be dismissed so easily as that. She was, in fact, approaching now, with a strikingly handsome young man in tow. She presented Peter to him.

"Prince Alexnov, this is my *fiancé*, Mr. Paget."

"Prince Alexnov?"

Peter knew, of course, that he had heard correctly, and yet he looked to the princess for confirmation. She nodded.

The world obligingly did a complete somersault for Peter. What had he been saying to the princess? It was lucky that he had never completed the conversation, because there was no telling to what lengths his enthusiasm at finding her might have carried him.

Anyway, his thoughts were much better frozen up, if there was a Prince Alexnov. Peter kicked himself for a fool not to have guessed that a woman so attractive as the princess would be sure to have accumulated a husband.

He found himself conversing with Prince Alexnov on the subject of the Gold Coast, of which the prince seemed to know quite a little; but in reality Peter's mind was elsewhere, making little crosses through all his vivid memories of the one woman who had really intrigued him. The funny thing was that the more crosses he made, the more he remembered, and the worse it hurt.

VIII

THE day of the wedding drew near as inevitably as Christmas bears down upon a man who has just paid the last installment of his income tax.

Peter was no ideal *fiancé*. He did the best he could, but he was morose and irritable. Annabelle was a beautiful girl, all right, and he was proud of her, but how she suffered by comparison with the woman whose voice played intimate little songs on his heart!

There had always been something about Mme. Quex that had fascinated him, but her transfiguration into the Princess Alexnov dazzled and enslaved him. The princess was at one and the same time an elfin child about whom an Irish poet might have poured out his heart in song, and also a glorious woman for whom kings might easily have battered down one another's city walls. There was something mysterious about her charm—the allure of the quaint and the not quite understood. A woman's charm, they say, lasts until you have solved it. No one would ever be able quite to say what was the secret of Princess Alexnov's attraction.

It tortured Peter night and day. This was a terrible mood in which to approach marriage with another woman, but what

could he do? There was no particular point in breaking with Annabelle. He might as well go through with it. They would probably be as happy as most modern couples.

And yet—

That was what tortured him—what made him drive about at random for hours, all by himself, in the country—what made him late for appointments—what got him arrested again and again for speeding abstractedly through the city streets.

A couple of evenings before the wedding, when Peter should have been holding a farewell bachelor dinner, or something equally masculine, he actually dined all by himself. He had few men friends who amused him, almost none with whom he cared to get really convivial; but he was distinctly *de trop* at the McCallum residence. There were too many finishing touches being put on the bride for a mere man to be of any use there.

He dined in gloomy grandeur—or, at least, he started to dine. His order was given, conventionally, to the waiter captain in charge of the group of tables at which he was sitting.

The waiter who brought the food did not cross Peter's line of vision until he had placed several dishes on his table. Then, probably, it was the waiter's hands, which were exceptionally finely modeled, that caused Peter to look up.

"Prince Alexnov!"

The exclamation was jarred from Peter's vocal cords before he could stop the impulse. The waiter dropped a fork.

"Sir," he said agitatedly, "not so loud, I beg!"

Evidently it was the prince. Peter had not been sure.

"What's the idea? Are you doing this on a bet?"

"No, *monsieur*. It is the only employment I could find, the only thing I knew how to do. A man cannot let his sister earn the money to support him."

"Your sister? You mean—"

"Princess Alexnov, of course."

"She is not your wife?"

"No, *monsieur*."

"Then whose wife is she?"

"No one's. She was to—"

Peter cut him short with a twenty-dollar bill.

"Pay my bill with that, and quit your job to-morrow—that is, if you're willing

to work for me in Africa for a couple of years!"

The prince did not think quite so fast as Peter did. He was still gazing at the note in his hand when Peter was on his way to the door.

"But, *monsieur*, where shall I find you?"

Peter laughed.

"At your apartment," he said.

It was no trouble for Peter to remember the number of the apartment at the Richmond Arms—No. 206. It had stuck in his efficient memory, as essential facts always did.

Fifteen minutes from the time he had left the restaurant he was there. She opened the door. Peter stepped right in and kissed her swiftly but positively.

The princess was surprised into Russian. Strangely enough, Peter understood.

"All right—I'll explain as soon as I've found out if you can do that again in exactly the same way!"

She could. She was the custodian of the thrilling satisfaction that Peter had dreamed about for a lifetime.

"And you like to be kissed by me?" he inquired.

"Yes!" she admitted, for the first time slightly shy.

"And you wear lace on—"

"Yes!"

"Correct answers! Now you can sit down here in my lap and tell me, as my social instructor, what a man should do when he finds that he is engaged to the wrong girl. What is the first move?"

With a sigh she settled more closely to him, and held up her mouth.

"You've already made the first move," she said. "That's it!"

MARRIAGE SONG FOR CELIA

SUN, be up betimes!

Birds, be early singing!

Poets, to your rimes!

Flowers, be early springing!

Bees, to-day quit stinging!

Shadows, keep away!

Heaven is beginning—

This is Celia's day!

When you hear the chimes,

Blessings go a winging,

Minstrels and mad mimes

Jests and music bringing.

Now is time for flinging

Ancient shoes—hurrah!

Hark, the bells are ringing—

This is Celia's day!

Swift the morning climbs

To the fated winning;

Then to other climes,

Round the green earth spinning,

Heart to glad heart clinging,

Happy, happy they—

Would we two were winging!

This is Celia's day.

Bride, this rime I'm slinging

Has far more to say;

But hark, the ding-dong-dinging—

This is Celia's day!

Richard Leigh

Happier, Far-Off Things

THE STIRRING STORY OF JOE OSGOOD, A NEW ENGLAND TOWN'S FIRST VOLUNTEER TO BE DISABLED IN THE WORLD WAR

By William Dudley Pelley

A FAVORITE stall to get your story past the editors in these latter days of reparation squabbles, Senatorial investigations, and aircraft scandals, is to declare in your opening paragraph that it isn't a war story, admit that the public is wearied unto death of war stories, affirm that you never would be guilty of boring it with a war story, and then—

Go ahead and write the supreme war story of your career.

Bear with me when I affirm, honor bright, that I intend to do none of these things.

What I have to narrate in the ensuing eight thousand words contains no references to Johnny getting his gun and marching vaingloriously away to Camp Devens, where he makes history by paring potatoes until November 11, 1918. It has nothing to do with the pangs of enlistment under duress. Not a whiz-bang bangs, so far as I am aware, nor does a cootie coot. It does not present a picture of the trenches at 5.55 A.M., with the village hero climbing up to swallow a chunk of Teutonic pig iron, and climbing down again to spit it out while a news-weekly cameraman cranks away for the benefit of the Olympic movie patrons in Racine, Wisconsin, six years later.

Nor has it any beautiful young heroine driving an ambulance, who meets the dirty villain in a shell-torn wood and joy-rides him back to safety with never a thought for the college sophomore lover whom she is running down and squashing in three or four feet of black Flemish muck. No, none of these. The public has indeed had much too much of them.

And yet, to tell this story properly, I must refer to the war—that is, assuming

that every one over seven years of age in this land of the reasonably free, recalls that we lately enjoyed a war, and that some of us haven't ceased enjoying it yet. Certainly, in a magazine given over to variegated fiction, if you think I'm referring too much to the war, you can stop reading at any point and pass on to the stirring and up-to-date symposium on "Nellie, the Bootlegger's Daughter."

Joe Osgood first came to attention in our Vermont town of Paris because of the war, and to tell Joe's experience properly I can't very well see how the bothersome war can be avoided; but I promise to confine it to our Vermont town, and I shall end the episode with the dead certainty that several thousand Legion boys who still read the periodicals will not rise up and accuse me of fraternizing with the blooming Hun.

II

To begin at the beginning, however, meet Mrs. Briscoe Busby. Every little town all over this broad land, I am certain, has one feature in common with our Vermont town of Paris. Invariably it contains a Mrs. Briscoe Busby.

Mrs. Briscoe Busby is the wife of a leading business man. Mrs. Briscoe Busby has money—at least, she toils not, neither does she spin; nor does Mrs. Briscoe Busby cook endless meals the year around, nor wash unpleasant greasy dishes, nor mend tattered little garments in evening quiet—for Mrs. Busby's only child has long since grown to man's estate.

Charity, for Mrs. Briscoe Busby, does not begin at home. It begins at church—of course the edifice where her affluent husband is chief plate passer and eventual

mortgage lifter. If Mrs. Briscoe Busby is musical, she dominates the choir. If she is not, or if her services prove superfluous by reason of the domination affording a professional quartet, she assumes charge of the Ladies' Aid Society, or Foreign Missions, or even the parish poor.

Mrs. Briscoe Busby, however, does not confine her altruism to religion. She is usually president of the local Shakespeare or Browning Society. She is an officer in the State Suffrage League and a directress in the Civic Welfare Bureau. It is she who undertakes to sponsor the annual Clean-Up Week; and the Child Welfare Movement, wherein the town's mothers are instructed in the proper methods of rearing their numerous offspring, is her personal creation.

So, on the morning after President Wilson had formally declared all good Yankees in a state of hostility to the Kaiser's seventy-three uniforms, our particular Mrs. Briscoe Busby's limousine drew up at the curb before a small and dingy white house in Beach Street. Mrs. Busby alighted, and closed the big door with a flourish. Bidding her chauffeur wait, she trundled up the broken brick walk and climbed two dilapidated steps.

Through her lorgnette she read the words "bell busted" printed in pencil above the push button where a name plate should have been to advise her that she had attained to the house she sought; so she kept on around to the rear, where many lines of washed clothes were blowing in the raw spring wind.

A tired, overworked little woman opened the door. She had wistful brown eyes and skirts barnacled with children, who seemed all of an age. Most of them had dirty faces.

"You're Mrs. Joe Osgood, I take it," began Mrs. Busby in her best "well-let's-get-down-to-business" manner. "I'm Mrs. Briscoe Busby, whom you've no doubt heard of, and I've called here to see your husband."

"Joe ain't home. He don't get out of the mill until six."

"Then maybe you could tell him what I want and save me another trip."

Joe Osgood's wife invited her caller inside, showing children's playthings from under foot as she led the way to her humble living room. There she wiped off a chair, and Mrs. Busby sank down upon it,

as if the walk from the motor had covered miles on miles.

"Of course you know we're at war with the Kaiser," continued Mrs. Busby, with two plump hands on her sizable knees; "and us stay-at-homes have just got to do our bit to help lick them Germans. A lot of cloth come to-day, for convalescent robes for them as get hit with bullets and have to go to the hospital. Us Paris women could cut it up one at a time, but that's too slow; so I've made arrangements at the knitting mill for the use of the cuttin' room and the automatic knife. Now all the regular cutters are workin' evenin's on war orders, and can't be got to do this work for us. That's what I'm here for now—to get him!"

"Would he get regular wages for doin' it?" inquired Ellen Osgood.

"Law's sake, no! This is for the Red Cross, I said."

"Joe works pretty hard through the day," the wistful wife replied. She grasped a dangerous pencil from the mouth of her youngest, and straightened another child's stockings. "And evenin's he can make good money workin' overtime to the finishin' room—"

"Mebbe, but these is war times, and all of us should sacrifice somethin'. It's unthinkable your Joseph should put his mercenary gains above Red Cross needs!"

"We're not exactly mercenary, Mrs. Busby. It's a matter of strugglin' to live, and Joe can make two dollars and sixty-five cents every evenin' he wants to work overtime."

"Yes, yes, but some one must cut out this cloth for the women to sew, and no one can be found to do it but your Joseph."

"Why doesn't your husband do it?" demanded the Osgood woman.

"What, Briscoe? Why, he's a big manufacturer, and—"

"He used to be a cutter once, before they made him buyer to the office and he got into the company. I heard Joe say so. It's as fair for your husband to sacrifice as it is for mine."

Mrs. Busby sighed.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Briscoe *wouldn't*. He's doin' his bit, he thinks, by handlin' government orders shipshape. My son's doin' his bit, too. We're all doin' our bit in the Busby family."

"Your son's doin' his bit?"

"He wouldn't be my son if he wasn't! Yes, Beecher Hamilton Busby's gone in for

flyin' machines, as you probably read in the paper. There ain't a single argument you can put forth for your Joe that would hold water side o' what all us Busbys are doin' to lick them Germans!"

"Joe's bad foot's been givin' him a lot o' trouble lately, Mrs. Busby. It's hard work to lay cloth and cut it. That's why they transferred him to the finishin' room, after he hurt his foot in the elevator. He can sit down there while he's to work."

"Think of the boys in the trenches and what they have to suffer, Mrs. Osgood!"

The Osgood woman gave up. Every one gave up eventually to Mrs. Briscoe Busby.

"All right, I'll tell him," she replied weakly. "Although it's takin' food right out o' these children's mouths to ask him to work overtime for nothin'—Red Cross or Green Cross!"

III

THUS it came about that one hot July night, with a thunderstorm brewing in the stuffy heavens, Joe Osgood clumped back and forth in the finishing room alone. First the flannelette must be unwound from the heavy bolts, and then it must be spread smoothly, layer on layer, on the forty-foot wooden table. This meant work—hard, back-breaking work. It meant handling that cloth alone, unfolding it on the interminable trips down the long table—forty or fifty thicknesses. Then he must mark out his patterns on the top layer and run the high-speed automatic motor knife through the serried mass.

For three hours Joe had been working beside that table. His head ached, his back ached, and his injured foot felt plunged in fire. At a quarter to nine he surveyed his labor. Only nineteen layers of cloth down, thirty-one more to do. He doubled his speed with grim tenacity.

"It ain't fair!" he groaned to himself. "If I refuse 'em, or quit on 'em, they peddle it around that I'm a slacker. Just because I try to act white about it, they shove the cloth at me and leave me alone to get the roughs out. They ain't even patriotic enough to come in here and lay the cloth for me to cut. It just ain't fair!"

He was a weary, patient-faced fellow in his middle thirties, sallow as to complexion, with hair perpetually awry, and with the flavor of cheap tobacco clinging to his garments. He rubbed his furrowed forehead. Then, after a while, he found a pencil and

made some clumsy figures on a bit of paper.

"On an average of three nights for the twenty weeks I been doin' this, I might 'a' got—my Lord, I might 'a' got a *hundred and fifty-nine dollars!* What a whale of a lot that would buy for Ellen an' the kids! I wonder if them females appreciate what it's costin' me in good hard cash to help 'em like this for the glory of it! They don't. They can't. To them, like that Busby, helpin' with the Red Cross is just a fad. For me, it's takin' it out o' my family, my pocketbook, an' my hide. It ain't fair, I claim. It just ain't fair!"

And yet something kept him from quitting the thankless task and trudging home. As his work-twisted hands rolled out the bolts, the ultimate destination of these garments stalked across the background of his animosity.

"I suppose I ought to look beyond that Busby woman's aggravatin' gumption," he reasoned. "After all, I ain't doin' it for Mrs. Briscoe Busby—I'm doin' it for the poor sons of guns who'll appreciate these duds when they're all shot to blazes. I'm a cheap skate to see it any other way; but *what* that hundred an' fifty-nine dollars wouldn't buy for the house!"

We know now, from the perspective of these last six or eight years, that Joe Osgood kept to his work, faithfully, doggedly. He forced his tired muscles and his pain-racked foot up and down the floor beside the long table, unfolding layer after layer of flannel. Paris and the nation might never know, but in the heat of the fearfully stuffy mill he kept on and on. The hours wore on and the lights burned dim; but the thicknesses of cloth grew upon the shiny table top. Outside, the approaching thunderstorm growled louder and more sinister.

"Thank the Lord it's goin' to rain," Joe commented, about a quarter past ten; "although I dare say it won't lower the temperature much in this dratted oven!"

The Holmes automatic vertical cutter that Joe had borrowed from the day man for the work was a small high-speed motor mounted upon a slender arched pedestal. Up and down the arc of this pedestal a razor-keen blade traveled at terrific speed. On its back was a horizontal handle, to guide its direction around the patterns. Its base traveled under the lowest layer of the cloth, sliding around on the smooth wooden table. The lightning knife, flash-

ing with the glint of a needle in a sewing machine, cut out the rough garments in great thick blocks.

It was twenty minutes to eleven when Joe had the final layer smoothed out and his patterns laid on the whole mass of cloth. He breathed a tired sigh of relief, and reached for the knife. The cutting would take but a handful of minutes. He might be home by eleven.

"I hope Ellen and the babies won't be scared of this thunder," he grunted, as he pushed the electric plug into the wall.

He placed the knife where he wanted to begin the cutting. He reached up and turned on the switch. The motor responded viciously. The ten-inch blade began to thump and pound with its momentum. Its motion was a steady, drumming slash, only muffled when the knife started into the cloth.

Outside the storm broke at last. Through the eerie quiet came sharp gusts of cold wind. The stars were long since blotted out. With a *clackity-clack-zit-boom-oom-oom* the thunder rolled over the Green Mountain Valley. Each time the noise seemed to jar the mill building, and the whips of sharper lightning dimmed the incandescent bulbs.

Then the rain came—great marblelike pellets, at first, which increased to a deafening roar on the roof and softened off into splashing spray. It drove in at the lowered windows and ran in gurgles from the eaves spouts. *Clackity-clack-boom-boom-boom!* At times Joe Osgood's scalp seemed to prickle with reaction from the electricity-laden atmosphere.

"It sure's a walloper!" the man commented. "Wonder if Pete Whalen's worried down in the engine room! Wish Dave Braddock would come up an' keep me company till it goes."

Dave was the mill's night watchman.

In and out through the soft material Joe shoved the blade with the skill of an expert. The machine's vibration made the table tremble; but the material—fifty thicknesses, four inches deep—began to take the shape of garments. Over it Joe Osgood bent, his right hand guiding the blade, his left holding down the material.

Again and again he paused to wipe the dripping sweat from his forehead, or to pull aside the blocks of culls that he had sliced from the rest of the pattern. Now and then he started in nervous reaction to the

thunder; but in the main his eyes were riveted on his work. He began to wonder what an experience in the trenches must mean with the shells bursting all around.

The temperature in the upper floor of the mill became a trifle cooler. He realized it, and was not ungrateful. Up to the shoulder and around the left sleeve, down toward the flap of the garment pattern he worked—the roar of the rain on the sloping roof almost equaling the drumming of the knife.

Then came the bolt from the blue—or, rather, from the black!

It has been said that one who is shocked by lightning never knows what happens. Persons who have been so stricken, and yet have lived to relate their sensations—or their lack of them—have so declared.

And yet—Joe knew!

He was just rounding the lower edge of the garment shape when through the place went a frightful *zit, zit, clackity-clack, boom-oom-oom, crash!*

The universe split about him. Green fire flashed before his vision. His head seemed to explode. The thumping knife leaped upward and turned over in his hands.

Then every lamp in the mill went charcoal black.

Joe Osgood felt a terrific searing pain all up his right arm. The cloth slued. The knife clogged. Groping blindly, uttering a shriek, he walked head on into a round iron post.

Whalen and Braddock found him when they came tearing up through the mill to learn if it was on fire. The lamps were once more burning.

"My God!" Whalen cried blankly. "Joe's got it—good!"

"He's bleedin' to death! Look at his hand!"

"Ugh! Don't touch it, Dave! If the telephone's workin', I'll try and call Doc Johnson."

"Look at his forehead! It's bloody, too. Does lightning rip folks open like this?"

"'Twasn't lightning. That damned knife did it. Yank out the plug. It's fizzin' yet!"

Whalen ran from the room and almost fell down the stairs. Braddock straightened the injured man and whipped out his blue bandanna. Binding it tightly about Joe's forearm, he reached for an iron bar and twisted it in the knot.

Mercifully, the victim remained unconscious. Pete returned with a pint of brandy.

"Got Johnson, by luck. He'll be up as soon as he can crank his Ford. Had this in my desk. Let's give him a shot."

"Joe's goin' to lose his right hand, Pete. Ain't that just hell?"

IV

I HARDLY know which brought Paris more excitement—the news of the armistice, or the reception that was given to young Ham Busby when at last he came home alive and well from France, with the bringing down of five German airplanes to his credit.

For two weeks the collection of souvenirs that young Busby had sent home to his folks had been spread for public inspection in the window of Joe Service's news room. It included a French helmet and half a dozen German head pots, a couple of gas masks, a piece of the wing of a wrecked German airplane, and different varieties of shells and hand grenades. Every day throughout that fortnight Service's window had a crowd before it. Those grim exhibits brought the war home to us as no newspaper accounts could possibly do.

One day a placard appeared in the center of the collection. On a coming night, in the Opera House, young Busby would relate his experiences as a flyer for Uncle Sam.

The local playhouse was packed to the doors that evening, and hundreds were turned away. Young Busby was no orator, but he had a dry, waggish, straight-faced way of speaking that held our interest from beginning to end. His grim sense of humor was immense, but he also fired our imaginations, and made us justly proud of the local boys who had helped to put a dirty job across.

Later, as I stopped to mail my Associated Press story of the meeting for the midnight Boston train, I met Joe Osgood on the bank corner. I knew he had spent most of the past year in bed with a siege of blood poison, and had nearly lost his life. He was more sallow and emaciated than ever. His uncut hair fell over a frayed collar. The stump of a wrist hung about his neck in a handkerchief sling.

"Hello, Joe!" I cried as cheerily as I could. "Been over to the Opera House to hear young Busby?"

Eyes aching with trouble were raised to mine. Joe whetted his lips, shaking his head.

"No," he said huskily. "Just come down street to see what I could see."

"How's the old arm?"

"Doin' fair."

"Where you working?"

"Not anywhere yet."

"Hit you pretty hard, didn't it, Joe?"

"Pretty hard—yes."

And yet I felt, as I watched him, that it wasn't his arm which had been hit the hardest.

"How've you managed to pull through. What's kept you going?"

"Young Busby's mother was mighty square. Got up a paper and raised some money, while I was almost passin' out. Gave a hundred dollars herself. It sure hurt me to take charity like that, but I knew I had to think of my kids."

"Won't be able to go back to the finishing room, will you?"

"I'm afraid I won't."

"And yet you've got to work somewhere, of course, if you intend to hold your family together."

Mentally I was turning over where he might fit in.

"Oh, I'll get along somehow. Lots of fellows comin' back with worse handicaps than I got, I s'pose. I'd a darned sight rather lose my mitt, like I did, than my eyesight or part of my face. It might have been worse."

"Yes, that's right—it might have been worse. Have you any plans for the future at all?"

He seemed grateful for my interest, as if he had been hungry for some one to discuss his predicament with him; and yet he was not exactly loquacious. It was some time before I got him to confess:

"Ellen was sayin', the other night, she wanted me to stay home and mind the kids, and she'd get back her old job to the mill and be the breadwinner; but that hurts—too much. I—I—if I had the money, or could borrow it—I'd—"

"Go on! What would you do?"

"I seen a magazine article—advertisement—where there's good money to be made in sellin' popcorn—if a feller's got the price for a wagon. You know the kind—all glass around, and an automatic popper. Right here on the bank corner I might make out pretty good, at least in the sum-

mer. One hand wouldn't stop me from doing that."

"How much would such an outfit cost?"

He told me, and I pondered.

"I'm not so sure the cash couldn't be dug up somewhere. Sam and I might loan it to you, if you thought you could pay it back."

"Could you? Would you?" There were big tears on his drawn face as he caught my arm. "It'd make me feel independent of charity, somehow; and—I don't want to see Ellen go back to the mill."

He was clutching my arm almost desperately with his good left hand. I laughed nervously.

"Drop into the office in the morning, and we'll talk it over."

I left him finally. Next morning, when I approached my place of business for the day, I found him waiting on the steps.

The money was loaned to him, and into the popcorn business Joe Osgood went. The night you passed through Paris on your New England motor trip last summer, it was Joe Osgood's red cart with a glass superstructure, lighted by a gas torch, that you saw on the southeast corner of Putney Square.

The boys came home—at least, those who had been spared to come home; the war of the peace conference was fought; President Wilson was stricken with his fatal illness; we had the false prosperity of 1919 and 1920 and the near-panic of 1921 and 1922. The boys formed the Hamilton Busby Post of the American Legion, Armistice Day was celebrated as a holiday, President Harding was elected, and then the night arrived when one of the Boston papers phoned up to the *Telegraph* office for one of us to hurry over to Plymouth and get the first interview with the nation's new executive.

And night after night, three seasons a year—and on every winter's night when the temperature permitted—one-handed Joe Osgood drove his "secondhand white mare," as the town came to call it, attached to the popcorn cart, down to the bank corner. He unhitched her and tied her in the alley behind the Modern Bargain Store. Then he went back to his cart and disposed of what popcorn the whimsical appetites of evening pedestrians commanded.

The wistful-faced wife usually put in an appearance around eleven o'clock. Good

weather or foul, she helped him re hitch the old mare in the shafts—he couldn't manage it with only one hand—and drove home beside him in the noisy box. On a hundred nights, when I beheld the faithful woman appear and help her husband with the evening's receipts and the mare, I have felt a mellowness and warmth about my heart to think that God frequently blesses some of us struggling, perplexed, buffeted males with Ellen Osgood's type of womanhood.

I happened to be lounging near Joe's cart, one evening recently, when down the walk came Mrs. Briscoe Busby. The war being won, and the demands of the Red Cross taking no more of her time, she was busy that week on a project to supply the homes of crippled veterans with fine radios. She saw Joe, considered, and went up to his cart, pulling out her purse.

"It's too bad, Joe Osgood," said she, meaning to be sympathetic, "that if you *did* have to lose your hand, you couldn't have done it in the service. Mebbe then the town would make more fuss over you, and keep your trade spruce. I'll speak to my son about it. You're deservin' of help."

But she must have forgotten, for no special help did Joe get. I watched him after Mrs. Busby had departed with several bags of popcorn.

I saw him sit down on the little stool that he kept inside the glass cart and look for a time at the stump of his wrist. His eyes grew large and round, and about his mouth there was a certain tightness.

V

I AM penning this little sketch in my newspaper office down here on the square, because this is Armistice evening. I have been unwitting witness of a little drama, the details of which I am certain that thoughtful angels noted and about this time—twenty minutes to midnight—are reporting in heaven. I am putting those details on paper at once, while incidents and atmosphere are graphic in my memory.

About half past four this afternoon, while I was working alone here in the office, the telephone rang. It was Joe Osgood. He asked me to come up to his house on Beech Street to-night after supper. It was something connected with the final payments on his cart, I understood. Sam Hod, my partner, came in as I hung up the receiver.

"Guess he's having a pretty hard scratch, Bill," the editor commented. "For

gosh sake tell him he doesn't owe us any more. I haven't the heart to insist on collections from a man when he's down. I was standing a dozen feet from the poor devil when he fell, and yet I couldn't reach him to help him. His lack of a hand to grab at something was responsible. He just went down on his knees and elbows, and for a week I could hear the hurt cry that he gave."

"He's up and around, he says, but he doesn't quite dare come down street."

"With a hurt foot, one hand, and a more or less broken heart, I don't know but what I'd fall out of my cart now and then; and yet that plucky little cuss keeps his grin. How he manages to come smiling through is beyond me."

"Maybe it's his wife, as much as anything, Sam. She's the real hero, I'm thinking. America owes its victory to such as she—because such women are footing the bill. Day after day they're footing the bill."

"Go ahead and see him. I'll cover the Legion banquet to-night. I want to go, anyhow—there's talk of electing my boy commander."

So, after the evening meal, I went up to Beech Street. The house outside looked as dilapidated as ever. A line of washed clothes still blew in the autumn wind, and the "bell busted" card stood out white on the front door jamb by the light of the near-by arc. I went around to the rear.

"I'm alone," said Joe, as he answered my knock. "With so many people on the streets to-night, Ellen felt she just ought to take down the cart."

He hobbled ahead of me into the living room. Mrs. Joel Fawcett, a neighbor, caught my arm as I passed through the kitchen. Mrs. Fawcett had come into help with the children's bedtime.

"Cheer him up a bit, if you can," she whispered nervously. "He's been feelin' pretty blue to-night, bein' held in by that fall he took from his cart, and all the veterans havin' such a blow-out down in the square. One of his boys brought up word they was burnin' red fire and havin' band music."

I nodded. The faithful neighbor remained in the kitchen, with a basket of darning, till Ellen Osgood should return. I joined Joe in the little side sitting room.

"Hear they're burnin' red fire and havin' band music down in the square," he im-

mediately observed, with the childishness that is constitutional with every cripple.

"Yes—the town belongs to the Legion to-night."

"On nights like to-night it must be great to have been a soldier, mustn't it? Damned tough and dangerous at the time; but when the bloody business is all passed and done with, what a heap of satisfaction to a feller to know he can kick in on all such doin's with a clear conscience, because he's earned the right to it!"

I nodded. Joe did not seem to be in a hurry to mention business. He sat down painfully, for the tumble he had taken ten days before from his wagon still distressed him in one kneecap; and he mused over the soldier business until I wondered if the wounds of the spirit, through which he had smiled so long, had at last begun to affect his balance.

We talked of the war. He amazed me by his knowledge of it. Every engagement in which Vermont boys—and particularly Paris boys—participated, he seemed to have at his tongue's end, as if he had been there with them.

"What's the *real* trouble, Joe?" I asked at length.

"I feel sort of sidetracked and forgot by Lady Luck," he confessed. "All I seem able to do is tumble around and get hurt somewheres. I often get thinkin' of that Busby feller—what he was born to, and the luck and glory he's had; and—it hurts!"

We talked then as men will talk. I did my best to cheer him, but over and over he kept referring to the band music and red fire down in the square, which he couldn't witness or have any part in, till it seemed to become an obsession. His hair was awry, as usual. His collar was off and his vest unbuttoned. His ailing leg was stiff on a chair before him, and his feet were covered with slippers.

Suddenly he frightened me by the wild way in which he started up.

"I keep hearin' it," he avowed. "Band music! Keeps gettin' louder and louder. It's when I hear band music that I feel the worst—cut out for whacks, the way I am!"

"I don't hear anything, Joe," I said, laughing nervously, and listening. "Your hearing must be better than mine."

"But I do—plainer and plainer. Are the boys marchin' anywheres to-night?"

"Not that I know of. After the concert

in the square they're to go to Oddfellows' Hall for the banquet, if that's what you mean."

Mrs. Fawcett came to the door.

"Hadn't you better lemme make you some coffee, Joe?" she suggested.

"Don't want coffee. I do hear the music! 'Tain't exactly comin' from the square. It keeps gettin' louder and louder."

The woman and I exchanged worried glances—and then we heard it! Joe's hearing was more acute than ours.

"Open the window," begged the cripple. "I want to hear it the best I can. I love band music. Seems I could just about die happy when a band comes down the street playin' some war march or other!"

I obeyed. In through the window, plainly enough now, came the soul-stirring strains of "Over There."

VI

WE gathered at the window, the three of us. The Osgood house is four or five hundred feet down Beech Street from East Main. There is an open lot behind Nat Newton's store on the corner. From the side windows of the Osgood house a fair view of East Main Street is visible almost as far down as the Baptist Church.

"They're comin' up this way!" cried Joe Osgood joyously. "They're comin' up this way, and they're burnin' red fire!"

Louder, brassier, more blood-quickenin', sounded the music of the Legion Band. Nearer and nearer the procession drew. Little groups of young people were hurrying along on the sidewalks to keep up with it. House fronts along the street were lighted weirdly, dogs were barking, auto horns were tooting. In the house behind us, the Osgood children were refusing to remain in bed.

Over there! Over there! Over there!

Send the word over there to beware!

For the Yanks are coming—the Yanks are coming—

Joe Osgood caught at my arm with his good left hand.

"Ain't it grand? Ain't it wonderful? Ain't it glorious?" he cried thickly.

It was. It brought back the days when a nation with its heart on its sleeve and a choke in its throat had waved to long, serried ranks of lean-jawed, long-legged boys who, with rifles on their shoulders and hats askew, were stalking resolutely, spiritedly, valiantly for that rendezvous in the poppy

fields of France, hurling their defiance at the German war lords:

"We know this ugly job. We've done it before!"

Over there! Over there! Over there!

Send the word, send the word over there!

"Pa! Pa!" cried a frenzied youngster in a nightgown, beside me. "They're—they're—why, they're turnin' into Beech Street!"

They were turning into Beech Street. In front of Nat's grocery store, the whole vicinity a scarlet-tinted picture of bizarre radiance, the music came to an end for an instant. A sharp bark of command sounded, and the ranks commenced to wheel. Down into the poor, muddy little thoroughfare that it was, Beecher Hamilton Busby's erect figure led that procession of veterans—boys and dogs everywhere, autos dashing past or following with accelerated engines, the snare drummer tapping in time with the tread of four hundred feet.

"Halt!"

The cavalcade stopped to a man. Indistinguishable orders snapped out. Squarely in front of Joe Osgood's home they were maneuvering. I turned in stupefaction.

Joe Osgood's features had gone marble-white—except as red fire sputtered outside and tinted his pallor as he leaned from the window. His eyes were popping from his head. Mrs. Fawcett found her voice.

"What does it mean? Why've they marched up here?"

But her query was drowned in a heavy crash of martial harmony that rocked the building. Four hundred uniformed men stood at attention in front of the house, packing the street, stopping all traffic. The band had moved forward till it fronted along the sidewalk. Torch lamps smoldered. Red fire sputtered. Splitting our eardrums with its closeness, on the quiet of that forgotten little street broke the strains of that spirited marching song:

Keep the home fires burning,

Though your hearts are yearning;

While your lads are far away they dream of you—

I don't know why the boys should have elected to play that particular piece as most of Paris tried to wedge into Beech Street. They might have played "Marching Through Georgia," or "America," or even "The Star-Spangled Banner." Probably they played it because of the popu-

larity it had won as a marching song of the war. Perhaps they knew it as well as any other. At any rate, played before that dilapidated little cottage in Beech Street—an epitome of all the humble homes up and down America which had sent sons, husbands, brothers, to make up the army that dethroned a blaspheming Kaiser—it fell into the same class with “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” or “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

There's a silver lining

To each dark cloud shining,

Turn your dark clouds inside out till the boys come home!

Joe Osgood swayed beside me, and I caught him. The music stopped. Heavy footsteps sounded on the rickety front veranda. Whether the commanding officer noted the “bell busted” admonition was hardly made clear. Anyhow, he fumbled with no bell. On Joe Osgood's front door he knocked four times with the butt of his sword. The peremptory blows sounded through the house like a summons that might awaken the dead.

“Joe Osgood! Whatever you're doing, leave it and come out! Come out before we come in and get you!”

And four more tremendous thumps nearly split the panels.

Joe moved forward, groping like a blind man. I got the door open for him. If he had had to open it himself, he might have been there yet, fumbling with the lock.

What a sight met our gaze! The night was lighted with crimson. The red glare glistened on the massed band instruments, on the boys' regalia and helmets, on the shimmering folds of the Legion Post's great silk flag.

“What—do—you—want?” gasped a wry, crippled figure, literally and figuratively scared out of his wits.

Ham Busby never lowered his official dignity, nor did he allow a muscle of his face to go askew with unseemly jocosity—though a little later I saw moisture in the young thoroughbred's eyes.

“Are you Joseph Osgood?”

“Sure I'm Joe Osgood! I guess—you—know—that!”

“Are you the Joseph Osgood who manages the popcorn industry at the corner of Main and Maple Streets?”

Had young Busby gone crazy? Were they spoofing poor Joe? Or had the old white mare run away with Ellen and the

wagon, made a wild dash up the Oddfellows' stairs, and wrecked their banquet?

“I'm the—industry,” he managed to articulate, at length.

“Were you the first volunteer to the World War from Paris to be disabled in action?”

No one moved in the street now but the dogs, or the shadows from thirty dripping torches. Every eye was riveted on that broken veranda, and every ear was strained to catch the young soldier's words.

“B-b-but—I d-d-didn't volunteer! I wasn't disabled in action.”

“Who the hell says you weren't?”

“But I wasn't! You know that, too!”

“How many hands have you got?”

“I—only—got—one.”

“Where did you lose the other?”

An excited youth on the side lines could contain himself no longer. In the pregnant stillness he announced shrilly:

“I know! He lost it up to Thorne's finishin' room, cuttin' out shirt tails fer Frogs!”

“Joseph Osgood, is this volunteer testimony correct?”

Joe was sick with stupefaction, shock, and perplexity.

“I guess it's good as any,” he responded somehow.

“Well, Joseph Osgood, you may consider yourself a prisoner of war. Your quarters are surrounded, and attempts to escape will prove fruitless! Have you got a collar and tie?”

“Yes, sir!”

“And a coat?”

“Yes, sir!”

“And a hat?”

“Yes, sir!”

“Can you get into them with only one hand, or must I detail a squad to put you into them?”

“I can get into 'em. But what do all you boys want *me* for?”

“Don't you know that the American Expeditionary Force is feeding its official face in the Oddfellows' Hall to-night?”

“I heard you was to have a banquet, with red fire and—”

“And don't you know why?”

“No, sir.”

“Don't you know who is to be the guest of honor at that function to-night—in honor of the first Paris volunteer to be disabled in action?”

“Love o' God, you don't mean me?”

"That's just what I mean, Joseph Osgood—you and no other. And we haven't splashed up here through half a mile of autumn mud, and set off seventeen dollars' worth of perfectly good red fire—to say nothing of blowing our gizzards inside out in the name of music—to have you give us the raspberry just because at present your feet don't track. Joseph Osgood, official orders from G. H. Q. specify that a detachment from the Paris sector shall surround your premises, take you into custody along with one collar, one necktie, one coat, one hat, and at least two wearable shoes, remove your body—with you inside it—to official headquarters, set you in a chair at the right hand of the commanding officer and your wife at the left, render both of you a salute of forty-eight guns, and then cram victuals into your pop-eyed hide until you burst!"

"You—come—after—me?" said Joe, still incredulous.

"The United States government doesn't intend that its disabled veterans shall be kicked around like old hats, or ignored like worthless yellow dogs, one day longer than is absolutely necessary, after deserving cases are brought to its attention. Takes a little time, perhaps, to get around to them all, because this is a big country; but the spirit's there, though the execution's often delayed. We've had your case brought to our attention, and we're taking you, as the

guest of the Legion, down to Oddfellows' Hall to-night. There, in the presence of all veterans duly assembled, your name's going to be written into the record as the first volunteer from this town of Paris who was permanently disabled in the prosecution of hostilities. You are warned to make no resistance, and anything you say will be used against you. We have our orders, and disobedience of orders in matters pertaining to war is punishable by a firing squad. Besides, in your special case, the commanding officer's personal mother will wham hell out of him if he fumbles his commission and fails to deliver. Do you get *that*?"

"Yes, sir!"

Ham Busby snapped around.

"Company, 'shun!"

Four hundred veterans came to rigid posture. The bandmaster got his signal. Asher Wallace raised his baton. Then, at the proper crescendo in the snare drummer's roll—while a completely stunned one-armed man beside me rocked dizzily, with tears washing down his sallow cheeks—the band boys broke into one glorious burst of heaven-reaching harmony:

There's a long, long trail a winding
 Into the land of my dreams;
 Where the nightingale sings sweetly,
 And a fair moon beams;
 There's a long, long night of waiting
 Till all my dreams come true—
 Till I find myself a walking down
 That long—long—trail—with—you!

THE FIFES OF MORNING

FIFES of morning in the trees,
 Piping to the marching breeze,
 Where's your morning soldier gone
 That with the dawn went faring on,
 Pure of heart and brave of soul,
 Marching onward to his goal?

Oh, where the boy that up at dawn
 Singing trod the dew-hung mountain,
 Saw the gods pass, saw the nymphs
 Dance about the sacred fountain,
 Holy with youth and rapt in prayer
 In temples of the morning air?

Still lives he in this tired heart,
 So soon weary and world-worn?
 Shall he again some dawning rise
 And step out to the fifes of morn?

Curtis Ward

Jolly Flatboatmen

BEING A LETTER WRITTEN BY THE HON. EPHRAIM WATTS,
MAYOR OF TALL BANK, MISSOURI, IN THE YEAR 1844

By Ralph E. Mooney

YOUR letter of the 1st instant came to my hand yesterday, the 15th, and while I am not sure my answer will be of any great value to you in your campaign, why, such as it is, here it is.

You state that you are running for reelection to Congress, and are opposed by one Luke Peters, of Billingsborough. You tell me you understand there were some facts discreditable to the aforesaid Luke Peters in connection with his doings in the city of New Orleans during our war with England, thirty years ago, particularly the British spy incident. You also say you understand there is bad blood between me and Mr. Peters, and possibly I can enlighten you in a way to help your campaign for Congress.

Well, I will give you all the facts about this Luke Peters just as I know them, and, as I say, such as they are, you must take them.

There was a young lady living in New Orleans on St. Louis Street, back near the old rampart, whose name was Miss Alice McKechnie. Her mother was originally Scotch, but they had lived in New York for a long time, and had come to New Orleans about 1805, when the Americans first began to move in there. Her father died of the yellow fever the first summer they were in New Orleans. He was Scotch, too, and was James McKechnie by name. Miss Alice showed her Scotch blood, having hair that was a little sandy, and freckles. A lot of women will tell you that freckles are ugly, but any man that ever saw Miss Alice will tell you differently, and I am one who saw her.

It isn't altogether her freckles that I remember, but the way she used to smile, and the way her eyes used to twinkle when

she was joking. Something lay behind her eyes and her pert features that made her truly beautiful. Her mother was just the same. They certainly were two wonderful women.

They were in need of money and were driven to take in boarders—which was mighty hard in New Orleans, because most boarding houses was run by mulattoes. They had to work in a dozen different ways, but they always had time to keep the house and the courtyard behind it looking like they were exhibits in a county exposition of some kind. They had a piano, too, and there wasn't a bar of music written in the old country or this that they didn't know.

Well, sir, those were fine old days. People didn't go tearing up and down the Mississippi at the rate of ten or fifteen miles an hour on steamboats. They used flatboats and keelboats and bateaux, and were glad to get them. There are some that turn up their noses when they see a flatboat now, but everybody piled aboard them then, with rifle and ax and bedding, and paid their ten or fifteen dollars most willingly. I was a flatboatman for seven or eight years, and was in the profession at the time you mention. The War of 1812 was going on then, and I had seen some service with the militia, but it was along the Canadian border, where such a string of disasters happened. Either the troops were willing to fight and the general was not, or the general was willing and the troops were not. They couldn't seem to get them matched up right, somehow. I got pretty much disgusted with the army, and went back to flatboating.

Along in 1814 I left Louisville. Mr. Zing was in charge of the boat, which was

named the Louisville Annie, for his wife. We had potash and hemp and staves and headings aboard, together with a dozen new copper kettles from up near Pittsburgh; also a few cases of bottles from along the Monongahela somewhere. They had come down with Big George White on a Kentucky boat.

This man you inquire about, Luke Peters, was one of the crew. I didn't notice anything about him on the voyage to New Orleans, except that he knew how to handle oar or pole and held his whisky well. He was quiet, too, and not inclined to join in general talk.

At New Orleans, as soon as we had unloaded at a warehouse, Mr. Zing paid us off. I went up over the levee near the Place d'Armes, as they call it, and back toward the rampart, intending to put up at Miss Alice McKechnie's. I noticed this same Luke Peters going over the levee, too, and thought well of him for it, because the rest of the crew, with Zing at the head, were making for the nearest barrel house where brandy or whisky was sold cheap. The general run of boatman was drunk all the time he was ashore. It seemed to suit his nature. I don't know why else.

I went to Miss Alice's house and found her at the door, which opened flat on the street, with only one or two steps up to it. As soon as I saw her, my heart gave a jump that pointedly let me know something I had never known before—which was, to be plain, that I was in love with Miss Alice, and had been for a long time.

I had often noticed I was all-fired lonesome whenever I started up the river from New Orleans. I had put it down to laziness at first, because the current was strong in along the levee there, and it took your strength pulling against it the first day out, whether you rowed or cordelled. Later, I had decided it wasn't only laziness, but lonesomeness; but that day I knew it was love.

That made an eternal difference to me. Before I knew what it was, I had been able to have great times with her, laughing and talking over one thing and another; but as soon as I knew it, I wish I may be shot if I could say anything that was in any way satisfactory.

"Law!" Miss Alice cried as I came up. "Whatever ill luck brings you upon us?"

"Now, Miss Alice," I answered, "do you really think it ill luck?"

I was so mawkish that she stared at me and began to laugh.

"Why, Eph," she said, "what has come over you?"

"Nothing," I said.

"Now, Eph," she mimicked, "do you really think it's nothing?"

Well, when I saw I was in love with her, I don't know why I should have wanted to keep it a secret until another time, but that was exactly what I felt like doing. You know how men are about such matters. To have her hint outright that she had guessed such a thing from merely looking at me knocked me west from the galley, as they say.

"Of course not," I said. "Of course not. Oh, Alice!"

I don't hold the reply up as a model for children in the schools, whether private or free. I merely give it to you. Miss McKechnie went into another fit of laughter, and as I watched the dimples on her cheeks my eyes felt like they were filming over. She got ready to say something pert, but she was interrupted before she could do it.

A man came up to the door and stood close beside me. I saw him from the corner of my eye, and was surprised. It was this Luke Peters we are discussing.

"Hello, Miss Alice!" he says, shouldering me a little.

"Oh, law!" says she.

"Answer the stranger, Miss Alice," I says, shouldering him in return.

"He's no stranger, Eph. He's Mr. Luke Peters, of Tennessee and thereabouts. Let me present you!"

"I've met the mudcat before," I answered. "He's slight surprise to me. I've seen a good deal more of him than was necessary already. Is my room ready, Miss Alice?"

"Oh, law!" You might get to thinking she couldn't say anything else, but that was her pet exclamation, so to speak, and this time there was general dismay in it. "We've only one room empty, and here you both come for it! I don't know what you'll do, unless you can take it together?"

We had stopped shouldering each other by now, and stood at different sides of the steps. She was looking at me and at Luke by turns. It made me mad that she could doubt her choice.

"I was here first," I said, "and I want a room alone. If I must have company, I'll choose to go elsewhere."

"First or last," says Luke, "it's my regular room, which I've had every trip down the big river; and I'd like it as usual, if you please, Miss Alice!"

"But Eph was here first," she said.

"Very well!" answered Peters. "If that's the case, I'll have none of it!" And he turned away.

"But it is your regular room," she said, real quickly.

I got riled past considering.

"So being, it wouldn't do for me," I told her.

Peters and me walked off in different directions. Miss Alice—I saw her when I looked back the one time—turned kind of pink and pale, and her lips quivered.

"Gentlemen, don't be childish," she cried.

Neither of us turned back, both being afflicted with love and stubbornness.

II

As soon as I was out of sight, however, I got to thinking that it was cruel to hurt Miss Alice just because a senseless backwoodsman from up Tennessee way should have noticed she was pretty and fit to be married. I began to walk slower and slower, and by and by I turned back. I walked till I saw the rampart, and then turned up the street to her house. I knocked, and she came to the door.

"Miss Alice," I said, "if so be you could excuse my temper of a few moments since, I'd like to take the room."

She didn't laugh, but turned pink again, with the same little pale spots in her cheeks. Her eyes filled with tears.

"I'm sorry, Eph," she said, "but I've just given the room to Mr. Peters."

I played reproachful, and looked at her as mournfully as I could.

"I'm glad of that, Miss Alice, because what I most wanted was for you to rent the room."

"Oh, Eph!" she cried. "I admire your kindness!"

I brightened a considerable lot.

"I was beginning to hope maybe you could admire me for some other things, Miss Alice," I said. "Do you think you could?"

"Oh, please don't be forward, Eph! Please don't!"

"Some time, Miss Alice? Some time you'll let me say a word or so, even if it is more or less presumptuous?"

"Some time, to be sure, Eph—if you should think of it again."

Then Luke Peters began to sing "Billy Boy" somewhere inside the house, so I turned away real quick and went off to a tavern near the river.

Next day I sent word around and Peters sent word around, and we came upon each other over behind Chartres Street, a short way from the levee, but a good long distance from the Place d'Armes. Almost all the boatmen in town had contrived to be on hand, and as soon as we both appeared they divided into two groups and began to yell and jaw at one another.

When I saw Luke looking at me, I neighed like a horse and began to roll my eyes. He neighed like a horse and began to roll his. I went up to him.

"I'm a thunderbolt," I says, "come down from heaven to destroy snakes and mules and half-breed men. I glory in catastrophes and live on blood and cannibals. I'm so strong I can pull a four-horse team backward from here to China. I'm so fierce I can fright a wild cat, and I hate a Tennessee boatman!"

Luke Peters eyed me and put a chip on his shoulder.

"I ain't none of those miracles," he answered, "but I'm as good a man as any alive, and a lot better than any Kentucky catfish!"

I knocked the chip off his shoulder and doubled my fists. He doubled his. I gave my war whoop and basted him. He basted me, giving me such a knock that it made a taste in my mouth. So we went at it, me basting him and him basting me with all the strength we could put to the affair.

I stumbled, and he threwed me and got aboard my chest. I reckoned I was due for to lose an eye, but he didn't try at my eyes at all, but contented himself with pounding my head up and down. That was ruin for him, I said to myself. I watched my chances until he was off balance, and then rolled over with him; and next thing I was atop.

Well, I remembered he hadn't gone for my eyes, so I let him alone, but I tried hard to tear his cheek. He got a hand loose and tried to tear mine, but I bit him plenty.

He jerked his hand away, and, afore I realized the notion, he kicked up with his feet and got one heel under my chin. It throwed me sidewise, and he got up. I got up and charged him. I think I slipped.

Anyway, I basted at him and missed. He basted me around the head, and I went senseless. When I came to, it was dark, and there was a doctor looking at me.

"Well," I says, "it was an ample fight."

"Yes," he answers, "it was."

"We must have gone on till we both were senseless," I says.

"No," says the doctor.

"What?" I says. "Then it ain't over!"

"Yes, it is—you've got a broken rib," he answers. "It stopped with you senseless and him waiting for you to come up again. He waited more than two hours, so it must be over. If there's any more fighting, it 'll be another fight, and not the same that was begun this afternoon."

Well, I swore there would be another one. I told Miss Alice so when I went to see her, and she scolded me for fighting about her.

"We wasn't," I said. "You wasn't mentioned. 'Twas just a fight."

"There'll be no more," she said, "or I'll never speak to either of you!"

"So much the better," I says. "I would urge you to stop speaking to him, anyway."

But there was no more fighting—at least, not between us.

III

NEXT day Mr. Zing came to see me. You probably remember Mr. Zing; but if you don't, I'll say he was the little man with the long whiskers that took the most boats down the river of any man in Louisville. His first name was Abijah.

He used to go back from New Orleans to Natchez in a canoe, and then up over the Trace to Nashville, because it was the quickest way. He went over the Trace several hundred times, and helped hang young Micah Harpe when they caught him at Greenville, Mississippi. He was bosom friends with old Swaney, that used to ride the Trace as postman, and did so for nearly thirty years, before the steamboats made it quicker to carry the mails around by river.

Mr. Zing came into my tavern with his whiskers standing out at all angles from his head. I was downstairs, finishing my breakfast.

"Was you much hurt?" he asked.

I told him I wasn't, and asked why he wanted me.

"The English are coming," he told me. "The whole army that was fighting old

Napoleon in France is coming to get New Orleans. Gin'ral Jackson has been sent here to defend us, and he wants every man."

"I'll be glad to oblige," I said; "but you must see I have this private matter to settle first."

"No, you haven't," says Mr. Zing. "I'll whale you myself if you try to go on with it when a parcel of redcoats is trying to stop the only port that flatboats can come to! Miss Alice says to tell you she'll despise to the crack of doom any man that shirks his duty to Gin'ral Jackson!"

"Then I'll oblige," I told him. "Where can I get my uniform?"

"You've got it now," says Mr. Zing. "A leather shirt and shag pants and moccasins is all you'll need. Bring your own rifle from the boat, and you may think yourself lucky to get your powder horn and bullet pouch filled by the United States quartermaster."

So I armed myself, got powder and bullets and some orders, and then went off to see Miss Alice.

"Oh," she says, "I'm proud of you boys!"

"Tain't hardly time to get proud," I told her. "Wait till it's over. We might skedaddle, like we did up around Detroit."

"You'll never skedaddle—not you and Luke," she says.

"Is Luke in too?" I asked, being more interested on that point than on the one of whether I'd leave a battleground hasty or not—although she did go a little far when she said I'd never do it.

"Of course!" she says, her eyes flashing. "Would such a man as Mr. Peters hold back?"

I had to look at the ground.

"Now that I put my mind on it," I said, "he wouldn't. I'll say for him, Miss Alice, that he's an eternally good fighter. If he ever goes to baste an Englishman, that Englishman will swallow his own teeth!"

Now, sir, perhaps you are not personally acquainted with the conditions at our Southern metropolis at that time. When Jackson started organizing, there were a scant few thousand of us on hand to defend her. After a few days, two regiments of Tennesseans come in, and some regulars, and after a few more we got the smugglers and sailors from Lafitte's colony down at Barataria to join us. Also we had about three hundred Creole militia, who drilled in French and wore

blue and red uniforms with loads of gold lace on them.

At the most, however, there was never more than five or six thousand of us. There was eight to ten thousand British, most of whom had been with old Lord Wellington here and there; but we had this in our favor—the men were willing to fight, and the general was more than willing.

Luke Peters and I served with the Tennesseans, but they kept us separate for a while, knowing of the trouble between us. I was put in an outpost on the Bayou St. John, and Luke was sent down the river road, beyond the gate of Choupitoulas. We didn't see each other until about noon on Christmas Eve, when General Jackson assembled everybody on the Place d'Armes. Previous to then we had been guarding different approaches and bastions, but from that day on there was no need. The English had sneaked up a bayou to Villère's plantation, twelve miles below the city, and there they were. The thing to do was stop them.

"By the eternal," says General Jackson, "they shall not sleep on our soil!"

Which was stretching matters a little, since they had been sleeping on an island in Lake Borgne for about a month; but no matter.

The word went around that the British were up and waiting for us, and that their watchword for this campaign was "beauty and booty." New Orleans was to furnish both. It gave me a cold shiver to hear it. I went to Luke, who was standing near in our ranks.

"Mr. Peters," I said, "the time has come when rivermen and backwoodsmen has got to stand together, and I don't know of any I'd rather stand with than you."

"Mr. Watts," says he, "our sentiments are mutual. If you'll give a look to your left hand, as soon as we are into it, you'll find me alongside."

We shook hands. I went back to my place, and sharpened my knife a few strokes on my moccasins. The band began to play, and we marched out of New Orleans.

The regulars went first, then the Creoles, then some artillery, with gunners from Lafitte's pirates, then an outfit of Tennesseans, and then another battery, with gunners that had served under Napoleon up to 1811. Mr. Flaujeac was in command of it. We came last, with some more Tennesseans. Altogether it was a more ornery-looking

army than most, but Old Glory was up at the head of it.

Across the Place d'Armes there were gray-haired old Creoles with tears in their eyes because they couldn't go, and hundreds of pretty women watching. Miss Alice was there, and her mother, and the general, too. He was thin and worn with disease, but fierce as a wild cat, and with his eyes telling us to make them eat their words "beauty and booty." Later, in his campaign for President, they got to calling him Old Hickory, and I never heard that name but I remembered him that Christmas Eve. It was what he was, sir—a piece of old hickory, seasoned more than usual, but still tough.

We got out toward Villère's plantation after dark, and formed in line. Two schooners in the river sidled up to the bank and opened fire on the British camp, and we charged them. It was a fair surprise, and we scattered the first ones; but the next had time to get on their feet and put their bayonets on. They turned out pretty formidable customers, being that most of us were hunters and flatboatmen, who had no bayonets, but had to tackle them with our knives.

As soon as we got close into it, I looked to my left, and there, sure enough, was this Luke Peters we're talking about.

"Knock up and cut under," he said. "Two to a man!"

That was reasonable; so when a soldier put out his bayonet, I knocked it up with the butt of my gun, and Luke cut under. The effect of this was that we cut our way ahead and got through a line of British troops into an open place. It was darker than blazes, and everywhere were men running different ways. Once or twice, by mistake, we pretty near cut up a Tennessean. Once or twice other Tennesseans speculated on cutting us up.

The next we knew a column of troops came tramping up, and we had to dodge. Another column came on the other side of us. We began to notice that the Tennessee war whoops were a considerable way to the rear, and that there was nothing in our neighborhood but English officers shouting. Then a squad of men came up to us, and, when we showed fight, they yelled. Torches flared up, and there we were surrounded by redcoats.

"Damned Americans!" says an officer. "Take them back, corporal!"

We saw we were in the fix of Davy Crockett's coon, and gave up our rifles.

IV

THEY took us back where the noise of the fighting was faint, and marched us into a house. As we went up the steps, Luke gave a whisper.

"I know 'em," he says. "Follow my leader!"

We went in before an officer, and Luke Peters stood up and saluted.

"I thank God," he said to the officer, "to be among friends again!"

It gave me trouble to keep from showing my surprise, because the way he talked was just the way the officers in that room talked—no drawl or backwoods language, but each word clear and distinct and full of meaning. With Englishmen all around us, you could compare, and Luke Peters sounded like an Englishman; but I leave it to you if he acted like one. I mention the fact particularly because this was the British spy incident. It is probably one of the things you have heard of as discreditable to him.

"What the devil do you mean?" asked the officer.

"I'm Montague, sir," he says, "commissioned an ensign with Lord Battersea's guards—on special duty, sir, among the Indians in Missouri and Illinois."

"Then how come you here?" asked the officer, glaring at him.

"They recruited, sir, and I couldn't hold back without incurring too much suspicion. We were through with our work among the red men, too."

"H-m! Who is this other man?"

"Joe Lyons, sir. He's a Canadian—a scout. He's been helping me with the Western tribes, sir."

Joe Lyons, I said to myself! Joe Lyons and a Canadian! Well, I can be that, if no other Canadians are around.

The officer was suspicious, of course. He tested us by all kinds of questions, but we answered prompt. Peters answered a lot that would have floored me. They asked who was in command of Lord Battersea's regiment, and where it had been stationed, and who was this, and who was that. Finally they decided to test the idea of our being scouts and spies among the Indians, and they called in an old Creek chieftain to talk the Indian language with us; but we both knew more Creek than any Englishman

present, and the old chief took us with a straight face.

At last the noise of the fight stopped altogether, and they got easier in their minds. They sent us into the next room, where there was a table spread with cold meat and bread and chicken and liquors, and let us eat. We filled up a plenty. While we were eating, other officers kept coming in, and drinking wine and brandy, and talking about the fight. They were worried over it a little, but it didn't interfere with their appetites.

There was one young lieutenant that got muddled and loving, and called us heroes to our faces. There was also an old major with a big red nose, who settled himself by a brandy bottle and glared at us. Every now and then he would tell Peters that our service was doubtless essential, but he despised the army for stooping to such things. We weren't military, he said. We looked more like savages than soldiers.

Toward morning they questioned us as to how many men Jackson had. Peters said twelve thousand, without batting an eye. They took it pretty seriously, and asked him how he estimated. He told a long rigmarole about how long the army was marching out of the Place d'Armes.

Another officer—a high one, by his braid and epaulets—began to talk to us.

"Two men don't make much difference to me," he said; "so I'm going to risk your being scouts, as you say. If you play me false, I'll have you shot sooner or later. Now, as long as the Americans know you, you can go back to them. I'll give you your instructions."

He told us to find out if Jackson got reinforcements, and to make a map showing where his troops were located. Then he said he would pass us out through his lines, which he did. When we got to the last pickets, they pushed us on out in the dark, and said the Americans had fallen back a little, but were somewhere ahead.

We started off in the right direction, but pretty soon Luke gave me a nudge, and we doubled off to the right till we came to the big cypress swamp that ran along parallel to the river, leaving a strip of ground about a mile wide for plantations. Both armies camped on this strip, and all the fighting took place there.

We went around through the swamp and into the British camp again, and stayed until nearly daylight, finding out as much as we could. We heard a man give their

password; so whenever we got in trouble, Luke either talked like an officer and gave the word, or else we dodged back into the swamp, where they couldn't follow, because they wore heavy boots and weren't used to swamps, anyhow.

It was afternoon before we finally worked back to the Americans. We found they had gone up to a place about nine miles from New Orleans, and had made a long breastwork on the far side of a dry canal that reached from the river to the swamp. The Tennesseans were at the swamp end of it. They were glad to see us when we came out of the swamp.

When our captain heard our story, he sent us to General Jackson himself. We told Old Hickory what we'd found out, which was considerable. The general said it would be a good idea to try and give the British some more information like Luke had given them, so we tried it two or three times, creeping out to their sentry line and giving them little notes and maps signed "Montague." Old Hickory afterward praised us, and said he thought it was this that kept them from attacking until General Packenham came along—which gave us time to do a lot of work and to have some reinforcements come in on a steamboat from Kentucky.

Well, when we were through at headquarters that afternoon, I said to Luke:

"How did you learn to talk so like an Englishman?"

"I come from New York," he said. "I used to play with Miss Alice there, by the way. We had English for neighbors, and they had a son in Lord Battersea's regiment. That's how I knew what to say; but we were on pretty thin ice most of the time."

"Not near so thin as we'd be on now, lying in some prison ship in the lake!" I answered.

V

WELL, we went on serving with the Tennesseans, and scouting, till the 8th of January, when the big British attack came. That morning we stood in line four deep, with the first rank firing and the other three loading. Peters came on my left again, and we had fun managing to make our guns go off together.

They sent a heavy column of redcoats straight at us, but only one man got over the breastwork, as you probably know. He

was an officer, and he yelled to our officers to surrender.

"Look behind you!" said one of our men.

When he looked, there wasn't a living man of his column to be seen, so he surrendered to us.

He was one of the officers we had met at the British headquarters. He scowled at Luke and me.

"You men will have a hard accounting to make one of these days," he told us.

We said we were ready.

Next day we buried the dead in the cypress grove that the niggers say is still haunted with English and Highlander ghosts. After a few days more the British withdrew to Lake Borgne, and finally got ready to sail away. Then the news of the peace came, and we found out we'd been fighting in January in a war that had been over since Christmas.

Well, we went back to the city and were heroes—for a while, that is, because it got pretty tiresome lugging your rifle around, and we all wanted to get back to work again, hunting or farming or flatboating. For myself, I was itching to get hold of a sweep. The army life was too lazy for me.

Luke Peters and I went out to see Miss Alice when we could. We went at different times, he first and me second. When I got there, Miss Alice looked sad and cried, and said she liked me, but never so much as she liked Luke. I mustn't feel bad, she told me, because she had chosen Luke a long time ago, and I had never said a word of any such thing to her until it had come over me all of a sudden that day.

It was a hard dose to swallow, but I swallowed it, and went and shook Luke's hand. He had taken a big risk saying I was a Canadian, when he might easily have left me a prisoner and saved himself; so I couldn't be picky or small in my transactions with him. I stood with him at the wedding, also, and then got drunk and kept drunk for three days.

Now, there is all the facts I can give about Luke Peters at New Orleans, including the British spy incident. I can't reckon that it will help you in your campaign, and I don't want you to reckon on me, because here is my position plump and fair:

Luke Peters licked me in a fight, and married the girl I loved, which has left me a bachelor ever since; but, regardless of that, he fought fair and hard, and he has made her a good husband all these years.

So, while there may be a certain sort of hard feeling between us, I'm his friend till the end of time. I never could afford to be small in any sort of transaction where he is concerned.

Furthermore, I wish to solemnly affirm as follows:

If any man in this town of Tall Bank, of which I am mayor, dares to vote against

Luke Peters for Congress, I'll lick him with my own hands; and though it's a long time since I was aboard a flatboat, those hands can still heft a full barrel, when need arises, and the right one, doubled, can drive through an inch plank any time there's money bet.

That's my word, and, such as it is, you must take it.

The Orphan Wild Cat

THE METEORIC RING CAREER OF BATTLING NO-NAME, CONTENDER FOR THE LIGHTWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

By William Slavens McNutt

THIS fight game ain't the good graft it used to be. To get by as a manager, these days, you got to be a kind of a playwright, or author, or something. It ain't enough to have a good fighter—you got to have a good story to go with him, or he won't draw.

I was in the game all my life up to about four years ago, and then I got disgusted and quit for a while.

I was managing a good boy—a welterweight, he was—and getting along well enough. I'd have been doing better with him, only I had an awful time getting any publicity. He was a mean, tough baby and a hard talker, and when I toted him around to the newspaper offices all these sporting writers give him the once over and went sour on him.

"What do you expect a fighter to be?" I asked one of them, up in Buffalo, when I was looking for work for my boy up there. "Must he do parlor tricks, or sing mammy songs, or pass an examination in soundless soup eating or something, before you bimbos will give him a fair show in your papers? If a fighter can fight, that's that, ain't it?"

"Well, your boy ain't got a very good personality," this bird tells me. "He's just a tough mug. There isn't any good human interest stuff in him. That's what makes stories—the human interest."

"I'm away behind you," I told him. "What is this human interest thing, and how does a guy get it?"

"Well, for example, if this fighter of yours was a good-looking, modest sort of a kid, who was—well, say taking care of his mother, or sending his brother through college, or something like that," he tells me.

"That's out," I told him. "This boy of mine's got two younger brothers, but he can't send 'em anywhere. They both been sent. One of 'em is in Sing Sing and the other is in Joliet. I never heard him say nothing about his mother, but I'll find out if he's got one living. If he has, I'll make him dig her up and take care of her, if that 'll do any good."

So I went and asked this fighter of mine if he had a mother any place. He said no—she died when he was a kid.

"Ain't you got any folks at all that ain't in the hoosegow?" I asked him.

"Yeh," he said. "My old man got out of the Michigan penitentiary a couple of weeks ago, and I guess he's still loose, but I don't know."

I explained the proposition, and we sent West, got the old man, and begun taking care of him. We might have got by with it at that, but the second day the old gent was in Buffalo he got all ginned up and tried to bean his son with a bottle. The kid lost his temper, and worked over his old man

until we had to take him to the hospital. The story got in the papers, and we were sunk.

Oh, we got publicity, all right! "Brutal Prizefighter Beats Aged Father"—stuff like that in all the headlines. The reform ministers preached sermons about it, and all the fight people in town were thumbs down on us because we were queering their racket. My fighter was pinched and got six months, and I quit the game cold. The way I felt about it then, I'd have got me a job of some kind and gone to work before I'd have messed around with the fight game any longer.

I tried playing the races for a couple of years after that, and didn't do so bad for a while. I used a progressive system that worked fine, only of course I couldn't stay with it. I did a favor for a guy who was on the inside, and he tipped me to a sure thing. We were out in Lexington then, and I was about three grand to the good; but I went down on this good thing stunt, shirt studs, tie pin, and cigarette case.

When this goat that's carrying my hope of a happy life bowed a tendon and pulled up limping like a barefooted kid with five sore toes, I didn't have dinner money on me. I made a couple of touches, and tried to get set again, but the luck was wrong, and the end of it is I start beating my way back to New York.

One night, a couple of weeks later, I was sitting alongside a fire beside the railroad track, somewhere in Pennsylvania, when a young bo walks out of the dark and helps himself to a piece of my heat. He was just a young kid, and the handsomest boy I ever seen outside of the movies. He had nice blue eyes and pink cheeks and red lips, like a girl, and crinkly yellow hair. He sure did look the part of a young tenor cake eater; only his clothes showed that he'd been on the road for quite a spell.

"My, it's chilly to-night, isn't it?" he said, squatting down by my fire and rubbing his hands.

His voice matched the rest of him. It was high and boyish.

"It's a cold night for little boys to be out without shawls around their shoulders," I says, giving him the raspberry. "My, my, and you haven't got your rubbers on, either, and it's been raining!"

"That's a fact," he says, looking down at his feet, as if surprised. "I did forget 'em." Then he looked at his hands. "For-

got my gloves, too," he said. "I better get warmed up, or I'll catch cold."

He stood up and smiled at me—the nicest, most angelic smile I ever saw on a male face; and then, all of a sudden, he jumped at me and smacked me on the nose with his right. I wondered how come Jack Dempsey could disguise himself to look like that kid, for I knew darned well nobody else in the world could hit that hard. He knocked me kicking with that one punch, and then lit on me, fighting like a wild cat.

I covered up the best I could, and yelled for mercy. Nothing else to do. I was a good fifty pounds heavier than him, but then, too, I was twenty years older and out of condition. Besides all that, the little devil could have licked me the best day I ever saw. Wow, what a fightin' fury he was!

Lucky for me he let up when I yelled enough. He got up and stood looking down at me with that nice smile on his handsome face.

"I feel warmer now," he says. "What I needed was a little exercise. You still think I need my shawl and my rubbers?"

"Kid," I says, sitting up, and putting my features back as near to where they belonged as I could get 'em, "whatever you ain't got, you don't need!"

Just then a couple of big railroad bulls stepped out of the darkness into the firelight, and made us welcome. One of 'em had a gun, and he pointed it at me.

"Hands up there, bo!" he says.

"You don't need any gun to tease me into going along with you," I says, reaching in the general direction of the Big Dipper with both hands.

"Who's been working on you?" the bull asks, looking at my face, which was all bloody and mussed up.

"Me and my little friend here was playing jack straws, and he got a bit rough," I told 'em.

They both looked at the kid, and grinned. Never occurred to 'em to believe a sweet-faced boy like him was what had done me all that damage.

"Runaway kid!" said one of the bulls, looking at the boy. "Might be a reward for this one, Danny."

"Where do you live, son?" the one called Danny asked.

The kid dropped his hands and smiled as pleasant as if some one had give him money.

"Out in Chicago," he says. "No use trying to fool you fellows. My father's a rich man out there. We had a fight about a week ago, and I ran away. I'll give you his address, and you can wire him and tell him where I am, and he'll probably give you a lot of money. I'm getting sick of bumming!"

"That's the right sort of talk, kid!" said one of the bulls, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder.

With that the kid hit him—a straight overhand right to the chin, with everything back of it from the lad's toes up. The bull dropped, and the kid jumped for the second guy—the one that was near me. He was the one that had the gun. That angel-faced boy went for his gun hand like a fightin' wolf going for a guy's throat. He jumped for it head first, grabbed the gun with both hands as he come in, holding the muzzle away from him, and at the same time he caught the base of the bull's thumb between his teeth, and bit.

I can hear that bull holler yet. He hollered, and of course he let loose of the rod, leaving the muzzle in the kid's hand. The kid wiped him across the jaw with the butt, and down goes the bull.

"Come on!" says the kid. "Let's go!"

We went, and the bulls come after us, howling and shooting. I was the meat in the sandwich in that chase. The kid was ahead of me, bawling me out and yelling to me to hustle; the bulls was behind, yipping and shooting and yelling to me to stop.

Naturally, I couldn't run as good as the kid could, but I could do better than them two big bulls; so after a while we lost 'em in the dark. We were lucky enough to make a nice, clean empty, with a lot of soft excelsior on the floor and everything, on a freight going East.

II

"Who are you?" I says to the kid, when I got my breath back.

"Nobody," says the kid.

"If you're nobody, it's your own fault," I tells him. "Anybody of your weight that can hit like you do can be somebody, if he wants to."

"Oh, I can fight," says the kid, as if that didn't amount to anything.

"I'll say you can," I tells him. "What's your name?"

"Think out one you like and call me that," says the kid. "I don't know my

real name, and I've gone by so many in the last ten years none of 'em mean anything to me any more."

We got jawing back and forth, and chewing the fat, and the kid give me the low-down on himself. He says the first he can remember is an orphan asylum out in Arizona. When he gets old enough to ask questions, they tell him he was left in the front yard of the place when he was about two years old. Nobody knows anything about him—who left him, what his name is, nothing. He don't like the place and the people that run it, and when he's nine years old he run away and got over the line into Mexico. He hooked up with an outfit of greasers in some little dobe town down there for a year or two, and then he come back over the line again and started to bum. Being just a loose kid, he was picked up time and again and sent to this institution and that, but he always made his get-away and kept on going. He'd traveled all over the West, and had gone to sea a couple of trips.

"Where you going now, son?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he says. "Anywhere—no place—it don't make any difference. New York, I guess. I've heard a lot about it, but I've never been there."

"Did you ever try fighting?" I asked him.

The kid laughed.

"You seen me fight twice to-night," he said. "Did I act like it was the first time I ever went at it?"

"I mean in the ring, with the gloves," I said.

"Oh, you mean prize fighting," he said.

"No, I never tried that."

"Want to take a whirl at it?" I asked him.

"I don't know," says the kid. "Sure! Why not?"

Then I told him about myself—how I'd managed a lot of fighters.

"You're the greatest natural fighter of your weight I've seen since Terry McGovern," I told him. "You stick to me, and you'll wear diamonds!"

"I'll stick to you till I feel like quitting," said the kid. "Whenever I do, try and hold me!"

"That's all right," I told him. "You don't know what living is, kid. Wait until you get to dragging down eight or ten grand for socking some sucker around the ring for

half an hour, and see your picture in the papers, and have guys follow you around trying to get a chance to meet you! Listen, kid," I told him. "Speakin' of the papers, we got to cook up a good yarn. You got to do more than fight to get by these days. You got to have a personality, and human interest, and all those things. Let's you and me think up a good story, and then stick to it!"

"You can sit up and do the thinking," said the kid, curling up on the floor of the car. "I got some sleeping to do."

It wasn't ten seconds later I heard him snore a little bit. The train was rattling along pretty well, and our old box car was jolting around good and plenty. I couldn't believe he had gone to sleep that quick; but I lit a match and looked at him, and sure enough he had gone by-by. Perfect nerves, perfect physique, perfect fighting temperament, and the punch of a hard-hitting middleweight!

"Mister," says I to myself, "you've got something this time, for sure!"

All in the world I had to do was to think up a good story to get this boy publicity, and good-by trouble!

Well, sir, I sat there and thought and thought, and nothing happened. Seemed like I didn't have a good lie left anywhere in my system. Then, all of a sudden, I got a hunch.

"Well," I thinks, "if I can't think up a good lie, how if I was to tell them the truth? I wonder how that would go! Gee," I says to myself, "it ought to be good, at that. It's never been done in this game!"

Well, sir, the minute I got that idea of telling the truth, I begun to have ideas. Course, I couldn't tell them just the truth and nothing but. I had to add just a little something. Then I got the thing all thought out, and I woke the kid up and give him the idea.

"I introduce you to the fight game as Battling No-Name, the Orphan Wild Cat—get me? You *are* an orphan, aren't you? Sure! You don't know what your right name is, do you? Well, then! That much of it's on the up and up; and this is what we add to it—we tell everybody that you're in the ring to earn enough money to search for your parents, and find out who they are, and if they're alive or not."

"To hell with my parents!" said the kid. "They give me a dirty deal, whoever they

were. I don't care nothing about finding them."

"Of course you don't," I told him. "I'm not telling you what you're going to do. I'm only telling you what we're going to tell the sport writers you're going to do."

"All right!" he said. "I don't care. Why not?"

Then he laid over on his side and went to sleep again in the time it would take you to blow out a candle. He was a cool one, that kid!

III

WE rode that freight into Baltimore. I maced a friend of mine there for the price of the cushions to New York, and started in ballyhooping this new boy of mine.

The kid went big from the beginning. He was a wow with the sport writers. He didn't look like any prize fighter any of them had seen before, and I'll tell the world he didn't act like one, either. He didn't care whether they liked him or not, and so of course they did.

That story of mine went grand. Some of 'em gave it the raspberry, but they all used it. Then one of the birds wired down to this joint in Arizona, where my boy had been in an orphan asylum, and checked up on me. He ran a big piece then, saying that the yarn was really on the level; and after that they all give us a bigger play than ever.

I got the kid a few good fights with try-out boys, and he won them all without getting up a breath. Within three months we were fighting every week for good dough, and the sport writers were beginning to talk about Battling No-Name, the Orphan Wild Cat, as one of the coming contenders for the lightweight championship.

That nickname I give him, the Orphan Wild Cat, stuck all right. One sport writer tried to tag him with the Brown Lily as a monicker, 'cause the kid had a big brown splotch low down on his back that was the shape of a lily; but he soon give it up. The kid was Battling No-Name, the Orphan Wild Cat; and pretty soon it got so that if you didn't call him that, the ringworms didn't know who you was talking about.

You couldn't faze that kid. He took all our success just as calm as he'd take a drink of water.

"Ain't this better than beating your way around the country with your hair full of cinders and your lungs full of coal smoke,

dodging railroad bulls and bumming hand-outs?" I asked him.

"I've had fun bumming," the kid said. "This is fun, too. It's a change. It's all living. If I'm alive, and loose, and feeling good, I always have fun."

"Well, what a grateful guy you are!" I says to him.

"You get fifty cents out of every dollar I make," says the kid sharp. "We don't owe each other anything."

"You were a bum when I found you," I reminded him.

"There wasn't any running hot and cold water in your bedroom then, either," he came back at me.

There was something in that, too. Anyhow, I didn't go any further with the talk. I didn't like the look in the kid's eyes when I spoke of how he ought to be grateful to me. He was the most independent little hellion I ever met. If he got it into his head that he owed me anything in the way of gratitude, it would have been just like him to dust out between sundown and dawn and never show up again.

Finally, after I had had him about five months, I got him on in a main bout in New York with Louie Cassell. Louie was the final trial horse for all the lightweights coming up. He wasn't going anywhere himself, but he was plenty good enough to stop all the other guys who weren't going any place either. He knew a lot and had a lot. Once you got by Louie, then you were right up among the three or four real contenders.

The kid took Louie like he'd take a walk—smashed him all over the ring for three rounds, and dropped him for the finish in the first minute of the fourth with a right hook to his jaw. Louie was cold for twenty minutes.

My boy was half mobbed on his way back to the dressing room. He was always popular with the crowd, and after the wonderful showing he just made a lot of the bugs had him pegged for the next lightweight champ.

"Well, kid!" I says to him, after he'd been rubbed down and had started to dress. "We're on the road now, all right! Every signpost I can see says we're heading for the land of diamonds and automobiles and big bank accounts! Pretty soft, hey?"

The kid looked at me kind of funny for a minute, without saying anything. Then he said:

"Be an awful smack in the snoot for you if I ran out on it, wouldn't it?"

"Ran out on it?" I says, going white in the face. "What's the idea?"

He give a quiet little grin and shook his head.

"I won't—not yet," he says. "You've played along with me, and I'll play along with you for a little while; but listen," he says. "If you think I like any part of this, you're crazy. I don't!"

"You don't like it!" I says. "Why, I thought you were one boy that actually loved to fight!"

"I do," he says, real quick. "I love to fight when I'm mad at a guy. I like to take a sock at any big bully that thinks he can get away with calling me something because he's bigger than I am. I like to fight whenever a fight comes naturally my way, like that night when we first met, and I smacked you over—or like I tore into them bulls that tried to take us that same night. I like to fight for the fun of it when there's any fun fighting, but this ring business makes me sick! I hate to get up there and smash up some good boy that I haven't got anything against, just for a piece of money. More than anything else I hate these mean-faced, fat-bellied thugs who couldn't take one good punch themselves without going to the hospital for a month, and who sit out there in the crowd and scream at me to knock out some poor kid who's getting a terrible beating and is just reeling around, game as a pebble, waiting for the finish. I hate the whole game! I hate everything about it!"

"You don't hate the dough you make, do you?" I asked him.

"No," he says, "I don't hate the dough, but so far it ain't bought me anything I'm very nutty about. I've had more fun bumming, in my time, than I have since I've been in this fight game with you; and fun's all you get out of living, isn't it? If the money I make don't buy me any more fun than I was having before I made it, what good is it to me?"

"You're crazy!" I told him.

"Maybe I am," he says. "If so, I've had a lot of fun being crazy; and nothing you can say will make me any different. I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll stick with you in this fight game for one year more, and then I'm done. Anything you want to make out of managing me, you got to make in one year, because after that time's up I'll

never fight for money again as long as I live. I'm through!"

"What are you going to do after you quit?" I asked him. "Go into some kind of business or something?"

"You'll laugh when I tell you," he says. "I'm goin' to take what money I have by then, and see if I can find my people."

"Your people!" I says. "Say, you been reading these stories the sport writers been writing about you till you've begun to believe them."

"Well, I been thinking," he says. "Maybe there was some good reason why they ditched me. Maybe they was poor, or sick, and couldn't take care of me. Maybe my father was dead, and my mother couldn't make the grade and carry me too. You know my mother might be a kind of an old lady now, having a tough time of it—you can't tell. Anyhow, when I get through with this thing, I'm going to shoot my wad trying to find out. I don't want to hear any gab out of you about it, either. You got one more year to make money out of me, and that's the end of it!"

IV

THAT was a fine piece of bad news to go to sleep on, now wasn't it? It spoiled my night's rest, I can tell you, and took most of the joy out of reading the newspapers the next morning.

They were some reading, too. Every fight writer in town gave the kid an odds-on chance of trimming the champ inside of a year. Inside of a year! Every time I read that, I had a cold chill. I knew it would take mighty near that time to get the match made, and pull the ballyhoo, and get my boy inside the ropes with the champ. I knew, too, what the rest of 'em didn't—that just about the time we got to where we could make the real big dough with the championship, my boy would be on his way.

All that morning guys kept dropping in to mitt me. They all of them asked me if I was sick, and told me I didn't look so good. Believe me, I didn't feel so good, either. I felt like somebody had give me a couple of hundred thousand dollars and then come around after a few minutes and took it away from me again.

Along about noon Jimmy Fealey, the matchmaker of the Barker A. C., come in and asked me would I get my boy to play a benefit for him. It was a society charity dido, he told me, and the champ was going

to be there, to go four one-minute rounds with somebody. They wanted me to contribute my kid to spar with him.

Say, feeling the way I did just then, I wouldn't have give the dust off my shoes to save the whole world from another war! I was just bawling Henry out good for asking me to do something for nothing, when the kid walked into the office.

"What's the row?" he wanted to know.

Henry told him before I got a chance—and told him, too, that I wouldn't stand for having him show.

"Who's giving this thing?" the kid asked Fealey, paying no attention to me.

"Mrs. Carmelo Starbeck," Fealey told him. "Swell affair, believe me! They're pulling it off in the grand ballroom of the Commander Hotel."

"What's it for?" the kid asked.

"For orphans," Fealey told him. "That's why they most particularly wanted you, on account of that yarn about your being an orphan—you know. Mrs. Starbeck is kind of a nut on this orphan stuff. She's head of this organization that takes care of a lot of them, and—"

"I'll be there," the kid says.

"Say!" I puts in. "What about me?"

"Well, what about you?" the kid says, looking me in the eye.

"This don't put me in a very good light," I says. "I'm your manager, and I just got done telling Fealey we wouldn't show. It makes it look like I haven't got anything to say about things."

"I wouldn't put you in wrong," the kid says. "You tell him we will show."

"Oh, all right!" I says. "We'll show."

"He's my manager," the kid says, grinning at Fealey. "He says we'll show, so I guess I'll have to be there."

He was hard, that boy! I never saw anybody look so much like a cross between *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, a cake eater, and a movie hero, and act so much like a crack gunman with a mean disposition!

The night of the big doings at the Commander Hotel, the boy and me showed up about nine o'clock, and was took into a room where the kid was to dress. Soon as we got there, a fellow in evening clothes comes in and says:

"Mrs. Starbeck will be here in a moment. She wants to meet you."

We waited, and pretty soon Mrs. Starbeck came in. She was class, I'll tell the

world! She was about forty-two or three, I guess; but, except for her hair, she might have been a twenty-year-old flapper. Her hair was silver white. Some might not have liked it, but I thought it looked grand, with her face like a girl's and her young, straight figure.

The guy that was looking out for us introduced us. Mrs. Starbeck just gave me a nod, but she sure took a good look at the kid.

"Young man, you don't tell me you're a prize fighter!" she says, in a shocked sort of tone.

The kid got red. It was the first time I ever seen him blush.

"I wish I didn't have to," he said.

"Oh, I don't mean that there's anything discreditable in it," Mrs. Starbeck says; "but you look like such a nice boy. I can't imagine you pounding any one, or being pounded, for that matter. You can't have been fighting a very long time."

"No, ma'am," says the kid. "I haven't been fighting for very long, and I'm not going to be fighting for very much longer, either. I'm quitting soon."

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that!" Mrs. Starbeck says. "I've no doubt boxing is a manly sport, and I suppose there are some quite nice boys who are professional fighters; but somehow I—well, it just hurts me to think of your being one of them."

"I'm glad of that," the kid says. "I'd hate to have anybody like you think I looked as if I belonged to be a prize fighter."

Mrs. Starbeck laughed.

"You nice boy!" she said, and leaned over all of a sudden, and kissed him on the cheek. Then she laughed again. "I'm a sentimental old fussbudget," she said. "I do want to thank you for coming here tonight to help us out, and I want to tell you again that I'm honestly glad that you're going to quit fighting pretty soon."

She went out, and Jimmy started to get undressed.

"She's somebody!" he told me, as he took off his collar. "I never met anybody like her to talk to before; but there's been lots of times, knocking around, when I'd have turned crooked, only somehow I just had a feeling in me that somewhere in the world there was people like her. As long as I thought there was, it didn't seem like I ought to be a crook. Funny, ain't it?"

"You're a nut," I told him.

"Maybe I am," the kid says, grinning; "but even you got to admit I'm hard to crack!"

He got his clothes off, got into his fighting trunks, and put on his bathrobe. We sat around and waited for a while. By and by the guy who was taking care of us come in and said they was ready for us.

We went out and down along a hall and into the grand ballroom. They'd been dancing, but they'd stopped long enough for some guys to pitch a small ring in the center of the place, and all the people there was crowding around it. I'll say it was a classy-looking mob—all the men in soup and fish, and the women in evening dresses.

They stood aside so we could get to the ring, and as we went by I hear a lot of 'em wise-cracking in whispers about how good-looking the kid is. They was all saying the same thing Mrs. Starbeck had said—that he didn't look like a prize fighter.

They give us a hand when we climb into the ring, and then the kid set down on his stool to wait for the champ. Seeing him smile at somebody outside the ring, I looked where he was looking, and I seen Mrs. Starbeck sitting there and smiling back at him.

Pretty soon the champ come along and climbed in, and they give him a hand. Then the guy that was going to referee—he was one of Mrs. Starbeck's gang, some fellow that belonged to a swell athletic club, and had had a little experience with amateur boxing—started to make the announcements. He said the fight was to be an exhibition of four one-minute rounds, and then he introduced the kid.

"Considering the occasion, this young man's nickname is quite appropriate," he said. "He is known to ring followers as Battling No-Name, the Orphan Wild Cat. He claims to be an orphan without a name. He states that his purpose in engaging in professional fighting is to amass enough money to make a thorough search for his parents. Ladies and gentlemen, Battling No-Name, the Orphan Wild Cat!"

Everybody laughed and clapped, and the kid got up and bobbed his head. His face was as red as a ripe tomato. If he'd been looking at me the way he was looking at the fellow that introduced him, I'd have started to run. The guy had given the kid the raspberry—not so much in what he said, but in the way he said it. His tone of voice was kind of mean and sneery, if you get me.

However, the kid sat down without making any break, and the guy introduced the champ. Then he called the two fighters to the center of the ring, just like in a regular fight, to get instructions. The kid stood up and tossed me his bathrobe.

The minute he done this, somebody let out the darnedest scream I ever heard. I jumped in the air. Then I looked around, and there was Mrs. Starbeck laying on the floor in a dead faint. I knew then it was her that had screamed.

People knelt down by her, and rubbed her wrists, and pretty soon a fellow picked her up and carried her out. Everybody was talking all at once. The fellow that was going to referee was gone from the ring, and nobody was paying any attention to us at all, so we just sat there and waited.

By and by a fellow come hurrying through the crowd, and come up to our corner of the ring, and says to the kid:

"Quick! Come with me! She wants you!"

"What is it?" the kid asks.

"Never mind about that," the fellow says. "Hurry up!"

The kid put on his bathrobe and went away with this guy, and I sat there, feeling foolish, for another little while.

Pretty soon the champ came over and spoke to me.

"What's the run-around?" he asked me. "This is a classy mob, and I don't want to be a sour ball with them, or anything like that, but I ain't going to stick around all night. What's happened?"

"You can search me," I says. "I don't get the play."

Then, pretty soon, the same fellow that had come for the kid come back again and got me.

"What is this thing?" I asked him, as I followed him out of the ballroom into the hall.

He took me to a room and knocked on the door.

"Come in!" I hear the kid's voice say.

"All right!" says the guy. "Go on in!"

So I opened the door and went into the room. Say, you could pretty nearly have blown me over with a puff of cigarette smoke when I seen what I saw there. Mrs. Starbeck was laying on a couch, propped up with some pillows, and the kid was kneeling beside her. She had her arms around him, and was playing a tune on his face with her lips.

"Well!" I says, in a kind of a shocked voice.

The kid looks up at me, and I get another jolt. He was crying like a baby! Him of all people—the hardest nut, for his weight and inches, that I'd ever bumped into! He tried to speak a couple of times before he could make his voice work, an' then he says:

"Dan, this is my mother!"

V

It was that brown mark like a calla lily, on the kid's back, that done the trick. When Mrs. Starbeck seen that, she knew him, and that's why she let out that yell. It seems that the boy had been kidnaped in France, when he was about a year old, and held for ransom. His father arranged to pay the price, and then tried to work in with the police and double-cross the kidnapers. They nabbed one of the gang, but they never got the kid; and none of them ever saw or heard of him from that day till the night he dropped his bathrobe in the ring there in the Commander Hotel.

Once you knew he was Mrs. Starbeck's son, you didn't need any birthmark to identify him. It's a wonder she didn't recognize him without it. A man and a woman couldn't look much more like each other in the face without being twins.

Of course, that was the end of my coming champ. Naturally! I'd told 'em a part of the truth about him, and I'd made up a lie for the rest, and I'll be darned if the lie didn't come true, too!

I'm through with the game for good and all, believe me! No more! I can train fighters, and manage them, and get away with it. I can think up good lies for them, to make good stories; but what's the use? You never know how they're going to make them stories end; and the end is the answer, ain't it?

Of course, I didn't do so bad by it, at that. Mrs. Starbeck give me twenty-five grand for finding her long-lost son, and I went into the concession game at Coney Island with it. I done pretty well. I run one of them games where they give away prizes; but these days, believe me, when I tell people what they're going to get for nothing, I know how my story's going to end. I know they ain't going to get nothing from me no time, nohow; and my dolls and watches and diamond rings and such-like never double-cross me.

Sometimes Things Do Happen

HOW THE LIVES OF FOUR YOUNG MARRIED PEOPLE WERE
UTTERLY RUINED—FOR A TIME, AT LEAST

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

MR. SAMUEL PEPYS set down the happenings of his days with unique candor and spirit, and, by so doing, became immortal. Edward Cane also kept a diary. Like that of Mr. Pepys, it was written in cipher, and it had a good deal about the author's wife in it; but in other ways it was very different.

Edward was passionately concerned with the future. He made prophecies, and it displeased him that these prophecies were not fulfilled. His was a just and reasonable mind. He knew—none better—how things ought to be, and he was displeased that they were not so.

He had, indeed, given up looking through the earlier pages of his diary, because it hurt too much; but he remembered some of the things. He remembered, if not the actual words, at least the spirit in which he had prophesied about this marriage of his. It was going to be different from all other marriages. Why not, since he and his Mildred were different from all other persons? It was going to be a splendid adventure.

"We shall never become stodgy," he had written.

Well, as far as that went, they hadn't. Quite the contrary!

This evening he began his daily record:

I have shut myself up in my—

"In my own room," he was going to write, but that was not exact. It was Mildred's room, too. She could come in if she liked. He couldn't really shut himself up anywhere on earth. He crossed out the last two words, and leaned his head on his hands, struggling valiantly to be just, fair,

and exact, and to crush down the extraordinary emotions that outrageous woman aroused in him.

Never, before his marriage, had he felt such fury, such unreasonable, ungovernable exasperation. He had had a well deserved reputation for being a strong, self-controlled, moderate young man. That was one reason why he had risen high in the credit department of a mammoth store—because he could handle angry, cajoling, or desperate customers so firmly and calmly; and here in his own home he was utterly defeated.

He raised his head and looked about him. He saw Mildred's things everywhere, crowding and jostling his things—even her silly white comb standing up in one of his military brushes.

"Well, what of it?" he asked himself. "I'm orderly and she's not. I always knew that."

No use—he could not be philosophic about it. He got up and removed the comb with a jerk. As he did so, he caught sight of his own face in the mirror. It startled him. It was a strained and haggard face.

"I can't stand this!" he said to himself. "This can't go on!"

And just at this moment the door burst open and she—the cause of all his exasperation—appeared in the doorway.

"Edward!" she said in a furious, trembling voice. "Will you get that ladder, or won't you?"

"I will not," he replied.

His own voice was not altogether steady, but he was much calmer than she. She had been crying—he could see that; and, as he faced her, she began to cry again.

"You beast!" she cried. "You selfish, heartless—"

"Look here!" said Edward. "I can't—I won't stand any more of this! I'm sick and tired—"

"And what about me?" she retorted. "After your promising to make me happy!"

That was too much. Edward could have reminded her of things she had promised, but he scorned to do so. Contempt overwhelmed him. She had no scruples. The only thing on earth she cared about was to get her own way; and she wasn't going to get it—not this time! Her monstrous unfairness, her ruthless egotism, appalled him. He felt anger mounting to his brain, destroying his fine moderation.

"Look here!" he began.

"I won't!" said she. "If I'd had any idea what you were really like, I'd never have married you, Edward Cane!"

"No doubt!" said Edward frigidly. "However, another woman—"

All he had been going to say was that another woman—any other woman in the world, indeed—would have considered him a fairly good husband; but Mildred chose to take his words in a different spirit.

"Another woman!" said she, and laughed.

"If things happened as they should," Edward went on, with heightened color, "I'd go away—now. I'd go off—"

"With another woman!" said she, and laughed again.

He was glad to hear the doorbell ring. If he hadn't gone out of the room just then, he felt that he would certainly have put himself in the wrong. His patience was exhausted.

"Oh, are you leaving me now, Edward?" Mildred called after him mockingly. "Hadn't you better take a clean collar—or a toothbrush, at least?"

Evidently she hadn't heard the bell, and he did not condescend to enlighten her. He made up his mind not to speak to her again, no matter what the provocation. He went on down the stairs to the front door, and opened it.

"Edward!" she cried.

Ha! She was giving herself away now! She was worried!

He opened the door wider, and, as he did so, he heard her start down the stairs. It was only a bill, left lying on the veranda. He stepped out to pick it up.

"Edward!" he heard her call. "*Eddie!*"

A sudden gust of wind blew the door to with a crash, and an equally sudden impulse made him go hastily down the steps and along the path.

The front door opened.

"Eddie!" she called. "Come back this instant!"

He strode up the road and turned the corner.

"Do her good!" he said grimly to himself. "Now I'm out, I'll just stay out for a while. I'll smoke, and take a stroll."

Unfortunately, however, he had changed into an old coat, and had nothing to smoke with him, and no money to buy anything. Also, he was hatless. He shrugged his shoulders with a fine gesture of indifference. He could stroll, anyhow, and think—think this thing out to the bitter end.

It was all bitter, beginning and middle as well as the end. Mildred wished to make a slave of him, to break his spirit, to destroy his manly pride. No—this should not be!

It was a strange, uneasy sort of night—blowing up for rain, he thought. Filmy black clouds went racing across a pallid sky, and the trees rocked and tossed. It was cool, too, for May. He quickened his steps a little.

"I'm upset," he thought. "I'm more upset than I realized."

Somehow, the familiar suburban street had a new and almost sinister aspect. The trim houses with their lighted windows looked like houses on the stage—delusions, with no backs to them. Faint and eerie music was coming through some one's radio. A dog howled, far away. Everything was different.

"This is a fool trick," he thought suddenly. "I can't stay out here. I'll go back and—and simply not answer her."

II

A TAXI came round the corner. The wheels, spinning over the road, sounded like rain. He turned back.

"Sir!" cried a voice. "Please!"

The taxi had stopped, and a woman was leaning out of the window. Was she calling him? It must be so, for there was no one else in sight.

"Can you please tell me where Mrs. Rice lives?" said the woman.

"Er—no," said he. "I'm sorry, but I don't know any one of that name here."

He spoke a little stiffly, because he did not *like* that voice. It was musical enough, but lacking in calm. She was not discouraged, however.

"If you'd just please look at this—card," she said. "Perhaps I've read the name wrong."

Now Edward was frankly suspicious. He did not want to approach that taxi, but he had not the moral courage to refuse. He would have preferred to be set upon by bandits, to be blackjacked and robbed, rather than show his reluctance. He stepped off the curb and crossed the road. He *knew* that something was going to happen.

The woman in the taxi handed him a card; and at the same moment she clutched his collar, and, leaning forward, whispered in his ear:

"Say that Mrs. Rice lives in that house! Pretend to read the card! Quick!"

What could he do? He didn't want to say anything, but he did not know how to refuse this agitated creature. He took the card, went around to the front of the taxi, and pretended to read the card by the fierce white glare of the headlights.

"Oh!" he said. "Mrs. *Bice!* I see! She lives there—in that house."

"Thank you!" said the woman in the taxi.

The instinct of self-preservation warned him to be off then, but he had also another instinct—that of helping other people who were in trouble. Something was obviously wrong here, and, prudent or not, he could not turn his back and walk off. The woman had got out, and stood beside him in the road.

"Please pay him and send him away!" she whispered.

So that was the game!

"I'm sorry," said Edward blandly, "but I've come out without a penny in my pockets."

"Here!" said she, and thrust a purse into his hand. "Only *please* get rid of him!"

He saw he had been wrong. With a certain compunction, he approached the driver.

"Five dollars!" said the man.

Edward leaned over and looked at the meter.

"Two forty," he said.

"She made a special rate with me—" the driver began.

"Two forty," said Edward briefly.

He opened the little purse, and found it crammed with bills—large bills, some of them—an extraordinary amount of cash. He was searching for change when the driver commenced.

Now Edward, as assistant credit manager, was not unaccustomed to remonstrances from persons who could not get what they wanted; nor was his nature a submissive or timid one. He felt quite able to withstand the driver's attack; but women are not like that. Bluster impresses them, and this woman was impressed.

"Oh, please!" she cried. "Give him the five dollars! Give him anything! Only do get rid of him!"

After all, it was her money. Edward gave the driver a five-dollar bill, with a low and forcible remark. The engine started up, and off went the taxi. It seemed extraordinarily quiet after it had gone.

"Drunk," observed Edward.

"I know!" said the woman. "He was perfectly awful!"

She was going to cry, if she had not already begun; and he wanted no more of *that*.

"Now, then!" he said, in a loud, cheerful voice. "Shall I get you another taxi?"

"Please!" said she.

She was crying now—no doubt about it. What was worse, she took his arm and clung to it.

"If you'll wait here for a few minutes—" suggested Edward.

"Oh, I can't!" she cried. "Oh, please don't go away and leave me all alone!"

He saw himself that it wouldn't do to leave her standing here in the street while he walked half a mile to the station for a taxi.

"I'll go into the Baxters' and telephone for one," he thought.

But Mrs. Baxter was a particular friend of Mildred's. She would bother him. She would ask questions. She would want to know what he was doing, wandering about at ten o'clock at night. She would suspect that there had been a quarrel.

The idea was intolerable. He would not go to the Baxters'; and, not having been long in the neighborhood, he knew no one else.

As he stood deliberating, the lights in the house behind them went out, leaving the world very dark. For the moment, he felt a thousand miles from home. He felt

marooned, cut off. He couldn't believe that just around the corner was that six-room house of hollow tile, with all improvements—that house which was mystically more than a house because it was his home. He owned it. In his experience as assistant credit manager he had seen what fatal accidents could happen to defer deferred payments, and he would have none of them. His rule was to pay cash. Mildred had more than once protested against this rule, but in vain.

"You're always looking ahead and imagining that all sorts of queer, awful things are going to happen," she had said, only the day before; "but they never do!"

They didn't, didn't they? A lot she knew!

"Where *can* I get a taxi?" asked the voice at his side, and he came out of his reverie with a start.

"I'm afraid you'll have to walk to the station," he said; "unless you happen to pick one up on the way."

"Oh, dear!" said she. "Is it far? Half a mile? But if I've got to walk that far— isn't there some sort of hotel in the town?"

"Yes—there's the American House," Edward told her.

"Then I'll go there," said she. "If you'll just please tell me the way—"

He knew that he must go with her—that she was one of those women who can never go anywhere or do anything alone. Impossible to explain how he knew this, or how, in the dark, and without having even once looked squarely at her, he knew that she was young, pretty, and charmingly dressed. Stifling a sigh, he set off at her side. It had to be.

She thanked him very nicely. He assured her that it was no trouble at all, and then they both fell silent. She sounded as if she were walking quickly, her little high heels clacking smartly on the pavement; but as a matter of fact their progress was slow—a snail's pace, Edward thought. At this rate, he wouldn't get back to the house for an hour—that is, if he ever did go back. He said to himself that he had not made up his mind what he would do; but in his heart he knew that he couldn't help himself. He was a victim of destiny.

"But it is awfully nice of you!" said the fair unknown. "Were you just out taking a walk?"

"I wasn't going anywhere," Edward replied gloomily.

"That's like me," said she. "I'm not going anywhere. I don't care where I go, or what becomes of me!"

This alarmed Edward. After having been married to Mildred for nearly six months, he knew that such people were possible. They really didn't care where they went or what they did. They were incalculably dangerous and reckless.

"All women," he thought somberly, "are alike—all of them!"

Perhaps at this moment Mildred was not caring where she went or what became of her.

"I know you must wonder," the fair unknown continued. "I don't suppose any one in the world could understand."

She paused, but Edward gave her no encouragement.

"I really did know a Mrs. Rice who lived somewhere in this neighborhood when I was a little girl," she resumed. "Such a dear old lady. And somehow, in my desperation, I thought of her." She was wiping her eyes with a small handkerchief. "You must think I'm so weak and s-silly!"

"Oh, no!" said Edward politely.

A fatalistic gloom enveloped him. He felt no curiosity at all. He knew not where he was going, or why; and what chiefly occupied his mind was a profound longing for a smoke and a hat. With a cigar, he felt, he could have regained his philosophic outlook. With a hat, he could have faced this situation more like a man of the world. He had neither, and he was walking off into the night, away from home.

The lights of the town made him anxious that the lady should dry her tears.

"I think it's going to rain," he observed in an easy, conversational tone. "Country needs rain badly."

He might have known that it wouldn't work. She paid no attention whatever to this remark.

"I only want to hide," she said. "If I could have found dear old Mrs. Rice! That driver—he was so awful! He was going to drive out into the country and murder me. I saw it in his face. And then *you* came!"

"I happened to be there," Edward corrected her.

"Isn't it strange, the way things happen?" she said in a low, intense voice. "Doesn't it seem like fate?"

It did. Edward said nothing. He was trying to invent some excuse for getting his

arm away from her before they passed any shops where he was known. He failed to do so, however. The lights in all the shops on the main street shone upon him, hatless, with the desperate lady clinging to him.

The portico of the American House was in sight now. They drew nearer and nearer. Ten steps more—

"Quick!" she whispered. She pulled violently at his arm, and in an instant he found himself inside a jeweler's shop. "He was there—outside the hotel!" she whispered. "If he'd turned his head! He'd surely have killed you! Isn't that a *sweet* bracelet?"

This last remark was for the benefit of the young man who had come behind the counter. He seemed pleased, and brought out the bracelet in a velvet box.

"Sweet, isn't it?" she murmured.

She nudged Edward hard. He glanced at her, and a thrill of terror ran through him. She was smiling archly at him. Her tears had in no way marred a most lovely and piquant face. She was a beautiful and elegant woman, such as Edward had frequently seen in his office. He knew these pampered beings, and their naïve and exorbitant demands.

"Yes," he replied faintly.

"Get it for me, dear!" she said.

He was stupefied.

"I want it! Get it for me, dear!" she repeated, with the same arch smile; but her elbow dug sharply into his ribs.

"How much?" he asked in a hollow voice.

"Only twenty-five dollars," she said brightly.

He turned aside, and from her well filled purse took out the requisite amount. The young clerk wrapped up the bracelet and handed it to her. As he did so, she leaned across the counter.

"Is there a back way to get out?" she asked in a low and confidential voice. "They're out there, looking for us, and we want to give them the slip."

"Certainly, madam," said the clerk. "This way!"

He opened a door at the rear of the shop. They followed him along a dark passage, across a yard, through a gate in the fence, and out into another street.

"Er—good night!" said the clerk.

"No!" returned Edward. "Look here!"

But the fair unknown, still clinging to his arm, positively dragged him on.

"Stupid!" she hissed. "Hurry up! Do you want to be killed?"

They turned the corner into a dark alley, and here Edward stopped.

"Look here!" he said sternly. "This can't go on! I—"

"Don't you see? He thought we were a bride and groom, trying to get away."

Edward believed none of this. He did not believe that he was in any danger of being killed by any person whatsoever, or that the clerk had thought what the unknown imagined; but women, as he had noticed before, always believed what they wished to believe.

"I have to live in this town, you know," he observed.

Of course this observation did not move her. Women never considered the future. They lived, reckless and heedless, in the present moment.

"Where do you want to go now?" he pursued. "It's getting late."

"Leave me!" said she. "It doesn't matter. Thank you for all you've done. Go away and leave me!"

"I can't leave you here—in an alley," said Edward, repressing a violent irritation.

"What does it matter?" said she. "I don't care what becomes of me!"

"Well, I do!" said Edward.

"Oh, how sweet of you!" she cried, and began to weep again.

"I mean," Edward explained hastily, "that I couldn't leave *any* woman alone in a place like this."

"You're so ch-chivalrous!" she sobbed. "I knew it the moment I heard your voice!"

"I am not chivalrous," replied Edward firmly; "only—look here! I'll get a taxi and see you home."

"I have no home!" she wailed.

"You must live somewhere."

"I don't—not any more. Oh, leave me! Leave me! I don't care!" She clutched his arm again, in that frenzied manner which so startled and annoyed him. "Oh, my hat!" she cried. "It's raining!"

She was right—the first heavy drops were beginning to fall.

"Oh, my *pretty* little hat!" she cried.

Now, Edward's was a just and logical mind, and yet even he had sometimes been illogically moved by trifles. This infantile plaint about a pretty little hat reminded him of certain things Mildred had said, and aroused in him a pity which the stranger's

tragic and mysterious sorrows had hitherto failed to inspire.

"Come on!" he said.

III

EDWARD was now the leader of the enterprise; he did not know where they were going, but he led the way, down the alley and out into a street which was new to him. It was one of those streets that may so often be found lurking near neat little suburban railway stations—a mean street, dark and deserted. A light burned dimly in a cutthroat barber's, another light in a shoemaker's, revealing the shoemaker and his family of pale infants. There was a—what was that?

"The Palace Restaurant—never closed," a sign said.

They hurried into the Palace Restaurant just as the rain began in earnest.

"You can wait here till it's over," said Edward.

He purposely refrained from saying "we," but he knew that he could not desert the silly, helpless creature. They sat down at a little table near the window, and, when the proprietor came up to them, Edward ordered ham and eggs and coffee.

"I couldn't eat anything in this horrible place!" whispered his companion.

At first Edward was inclined to agree with her. It was not an appetizing place. The tablecloth was stained, and there was a stale and unpleasant aroma in the air. A glass case displayed a lemon meringue pie and a raisin cake which did not appeal to him.

When the food came, however, he ate it—to his regret, for, after having eaten, his desire for a smoke increased tenfold. He could think of little else. Stern and silent, he sat there thinking of the cigars in the pocket of his other coat, of the box of cigars in his office. He knew this to be a weakness, and he was struggling against it; but the struggle was difficult, and he was in no mood for his companion's words.

"You're unhappy—like me," she said softly.

"No," said Edward. "No—it's entirely different."

"Oh, I understand!" she said.

She went on, about life, and how hard it is when you really feel things, and how alone you are, even in the midst of crowds. He tried not to listen, but he had to hear some of it, and it infuriated him.

"Very likely," he said; "but I'd like to know your plans. What do you want me to do? Get you a cab, or what?"

She shrank back.

"Oh!" she said. "I see! You mean—I understand! You want to go. Leave me, then! Go! Why should you care what happens to me?"

"It's after eleven," was all that Edward answered.

There was a silence.

"Very well!" she said coldly. "I shall take the next train into the city."

There was another silence. The proprietor had retired, and they had the Palace Restaurant entirely to themselves. The rain was dashing against the windows. The street light outside showed only darkness.

What, Edward wondered, was Mildred doing now? She was capable of anything—of telephoning to the Baxters, to the police. Perhaps she had gone away herself. Perhaps she was wandering about in this storm, searching for her husband. It was a wild and fantastic notion, but that was the sort of thing women did. Look at this one! He did look at her, and she looked at him, with cold scorn.

"Will you be kind enough—" she began.

Just then the door opened and two men came in. They were the editor and the subeditor of the local paper, both of whom Edward knew.

"Hello, Cane!" said the editor. "Just put the paper to bed. What are you doing here?"

"Nothing much," Edward replied as casually as possible.

The editor turned to the fair unknown.

"How do you like our little town, Mrs. Cane?" he asked. "Once you get to know—"

"I am not Mrs. Cane," she interrupted frigidly.

"Oh! I—er—yes," said the editor.

He waited a moment, but no one said anything. Then he and his colleague sat down at a table as far away as they could get.

"Why didn't you keep still?" said Edward in a low, fierce voice. "He's editor of the newspaper here."

"Did you imagine I was that sort of woman?" she returned. "Did you think I would pretend to be the wife of a perfect stranger?"

"No," said Edward; "but you didn't need to say anything. He'll talk—"

"Do you imagine I care?" said she.

Of course she didn't. Women care only for themselves. Edward could not trust himself to speak, but he thought. He thought.

"I'll find out who she is," he said to himself, "so that I can send her back for the money for her ham and eggs."

A dismal bellow pierced the night.

"The eleven forty pulling out," observed the editor to his companion.

Edward heard this.

"When's the next train into the city?" he asked, across the room.

"Five twenty to-morrow morning."

"Now you see what you've done!" said the fair unknown to Edward.

"What I've done?" said he, amazed and indignant; but she was far more indignant than he.

"Now what am I going to do?" she demanded. "The last train's gone. I can't go into the city, and there's nowhere here for me to stay."

"Are you blaming me for—"

"Yes," said she. "You're a man. You ought to have—"

"Just what ought I have done?" Edward inquired with biting irony.

"I don't care!" said she. "Very well! I'm going to stay here all night."

"You can't."

"I'm going to!" said she.

"And I thought Mildred was unreasonable!" Edward reflected.

The image of Mildred rose before him, remarkably vivid. With great justice and moderation he compared her with this unknown individual. All women were not alike. Mildred was different. There was something about her— Sometimes, of course, she was simply outrageous, but, even at that— That time when he had the flu—or when anything went wrong in the office—

"And she's very young," thought the just man. "She's nothing but a kid. Perhaps I should have made allowances."

"Won't you smoke?" said a voice.

Glancing up, he saw the fair unknown proffering a silver cigarette case. Edward did not smoke cigarettes, and he had pretty severe theories about people who did so, but this time he was weak. He took one and lighted it. It was a horrible perfumed thing, but it helped him. The fact that he had broken one of his rules helped him, too. He felt more tolerant.

"Don't you—er—smoke?" he asked his companion.

He thought she was just the sort of person who would; but she shook her head.

"Arthur doesn't like me to," she said. Her voice had changed, and her face, too. She was downcast and pale. "I made him get me that case," she went on. "He hated to, but I made him."

Tears had come into her eyes again, but this time Edward felt rather sorry for her.

"Don't cry!" he said kindly—the more so as the two editors had just gone out, in discreet silence.

"I can't help it!" said she. "My whole life is ruined. You don't know—oh, you don't know what a beast I've been! And now—now I've lost Arthur!"

"Who is Arthur?" Edward asked sympathetically.

"My husband," said she. The tears were raining down her cheeks. "My dear, kind, wonderful, darling husband! I wanted to punish him, and frighten him, and I ran away. We had a quarrel. My life is ruined, and all because of a penny!"

"A penny?"

"Yes. Arthur said the two sides were called heads and tails, and I said they were called odds and evens. I know he was wrong, but why didn't I give in? Oh, why didn't I give in? Both our lives ruined! He's frightfully jealous. He'll never forgive this—and for a trifle like that!"

"I—" said Edward, and stopped. His face, too, had grown pale. "Ours was about a cat—Mildred's cat," he went on. "It got up a tree, and she wanted me to go next door and get a ladder and get it down. I told her it could get down by itself when it was ready. She—"

"How cruel of you!" interrupted his companion.

"It was not cruel," asserted Edward.

"It was! If you loved Mildred, you'd get dozens of ladders for her."

"If she loved me, she wouldn't ask me to make such a monkey of myself," retorted Edward. "I did it once, and the people next door laughed at me. I heard them."

"You shouldn't care," said the fair unknown severely. "You were entirely in the wrong."

"As a matter of fact," said Edward, "you were entirely in the wrong yourself, about that penny."

"What?" said she.

She rose and faced him with flashing

eyes. Edward rose, too. His eyes did not flash, but they were steely. They regarded each other steadily, with magnificent pride. Suddenly she began to laugh.

"I am glad," said Edward, "that you find this amusing."

"Oh, dear!" she said, sinking back into her chair. "Aren't we pig-headed, both of us?"

"Kindly don't—" Edward began, but she did not heed him.

"Oh! A penny—and a cat!"

"Well," said Edward, "perhaps—"

"Come on!" said she, rising again.

"Let's go back and start all over again!"

"I—" Edward began.

"Oh, do come on!" she cried impatiently. "It was Arthur I saw outside the American House—when I pulled you into the jeweler's, you know. Oh, do hurry! He's traced me that far—perhaps we'll find him still there!"

"We?"

"Of course!" she said. "You've got to explain everything to Arthur. Come on!"

"But your hat!" Edward reminded her, as a last desperate plea.

"My hat!" she replied with supreme scorn.

So they went out of the Palace Restaurant into the driving rain.

IV

"WHEW!" said Edward to himself, wiping his moist brow with a still moister handkerchief. "Whew!"

Arthur had been found in the American House, and he had been difficult to handle. If Edward had not had such a thorough training in his business, he could never have handled the situation in so masterly a fashion. Arthur was a rich young man, and accustomed to being kotowed to. Edward, however, was accustomed to rich people who were accustomed to being kotowed to. Many times he had explained to wealthy and indignant customers facts which they had not cared to consider—that, for instance, the mere possession of enough money to pay one's bills did not suffice for a credit department; that there must be a certain willingness to use the money for that purpose.

Edward had not kotowed to Arthur. He had been mighty firm with him, though kind, for he had felt sorry for the man. It had been a bad night for Arthur. He had been desperately worried about his

wife. Patiently, inexorably, Edward had made him listen to reason, and in the end there was a touching and beautiful reconciliation. Arthur's wife, with truly admirable unselfishness, had said that it did not matter who was right about the penny. Both of them had declared that they owed everything to Edward and would be his lifelong friends.

He was now at liberty to attend to his own little affair. Having no money to pay for a taxi, he set off on foot in the direction of his home. It was still raining, and as black as the pit, yet he fancied he could feel dawn in the air. Taking out his watch, he saw that it was half past four. He had been away all night. He remembered his last words to Mildred:

"If things happened as they should—"

She had said that they never did, but they had. He was strangely justified, yet he felt no triumph. The rain fell cold upon his uncovered head, and his spirit was cold within him.

"She must have been worrying," thought Edward.

Indeed, that was an inadequate word for what he knew she must have felt. He thought about Mildred, not in her outrageous moments, but as she was at other times, when she was her unique and incomparable self. He thought about marriage, in a large, general way. He also thought about his own marriage, and what he had intended it to be.

At last he thought about himself. Soaked through to the skin, cold and weary, Edward groped after justice. It was a creditable performance—the more so because he was unaware of it. He groped, and he found a new and startling piece of wisdom.

He quickened his pace. The wind had died down and the rain had stopped, but he did not know that, for the drops still pattered thickly from the trees. As he turned the corner of his own street, he saw in the sky the first streak of dawn—a pale gray creeping up into the black.

His reasonable mind told him that there was no cause here for wonder, yet he did wonder. He stopped for a moment and watched the marvelous dawn—watched it make a fresh and utterly new day and a new world. His own house seemed to grow before his eyes, turning from a shadowy mass into something familiar and yet strange. He had come home—after what extraordinary wanderings!

He advanced, walking on the sodden grass, so that his steps should be noiseless. He entered his neighbor's garden, thankful that they kept no dog. He took a ladder from the unlocked tool shed, and, carrying it with some difficulty, set it up against a certain tree on his own front lawn.

Then, still noiselessly, he stole up on the veranda, and, stooping, examined the door-mat and the darkest corners. Unsatisfied, he went around to the back of the house; and there, against the kitchen door, he found that which he sought—a cat. He wished to tell Mildred that he had brought her cat down from the tree, and he would not lie. It should be true.

The cat was mutinous. She struggled as he held her under his arm, and it was difficult to ascend the ladder. However, he did so. He put the cat on a branch, and let go of her for an instant, in order to get a better hold on her for the descent. She began climbing higher up. He clutched at her, but she eluded him. She was a heavy cat, but she went up a slender branch, which bent perilously beneath her.

"Kitty! Kitty!" whispered Edward.
"Oh, you fool!"

Her hind legs had slipped off, and for an instant they were kicking desperately in the air, reminding him of a Zouave in white gaiters.

"Come, kitty!" murmured Edward.
"Come on, kitty!"

The creature clawed and clutched desperately, swung under the bending branch, came up on the other side, and began to come down, facing him with wild yellow eyes. He caught her as she came within

reach. He thought the touch of a firm human hand would reassure the terrified animal, but it was not so. She appeared to be suspicious and resentful.

As the cat's claws pierced his shoulder, Edward recoiled, and very nearly fell from the ladder. Probably he uttered some sort of exclamation, as almost anybody would. Anyhow, Mildred's head appeared at an upper window.

"I'm getting your cat down," Edward explained.

By the time he had reached the foot of the ladder, with the cat, Mildred had opened the front door. She was carrying something in her arms, which she set down in the shadow of the veranda. She gave it a gentle push with her foot, and it ran off, unseen by Edward.

Edward set down his cat, and she also ran off.

"There you are!" he said.

Mildred came down the steps.

"Oh, Eddie!" she cried.

It was quite light now in the open. He could see her face, and it seemed to him rather wonderful.

"Eddie!" she said. "You're soaking wet! Oh, Eddie, it was all my fault!"

"I don't know that it was," replied Edward meditatively. "Some of it was my fault, I think."

She came nearer to him.

"Oh, Eddie!" she cried. "It really doesn't matter one bit whose fault things are, does it?"

He was startled, for that was his own particular bit of wisdom, painfully arrived at. Mildred *was* a remarkable girl!

TREES

WHEN they stand stark
Against the winter sky,
Their naked beauty
Bare before my eye,
I seem to know
How they are made, and why.

But when they wear
The green disguise of dress,
They hold a mystery
I cannot guess,
As women baffle me
With loveliness!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery

Oh, Solitude!

A FUGITIVE FROM THE MADDING CROWD RECEIVES NEW
LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT OF THE CHARMS
OF A SOLITARY LIFE

By Mary Arbuckle

"AND Joe Francisco, that sells vegetables, passes along the road Tuesdays and Fridays. If you're out that way around nine o'clock, you can catch him. He might bring you milk, too."

"Yes—thanks for telling me. I'll see about all that when I get settled."

Elliot Small wished intensely that the man would go. He had been exuding helpful information all along the road, and now that he had deposited passenger and trunk on the porch of the cottage, he still continued to do so, sitting inertly in the wagon, with the reins dangling from his hands. Small could hardly restrain himself from clucking to the horse.

"And if you want ice later on, when it gets hot, Joe can bring it from the fish storage house."

"Yes, yes—very kind of you to tell me!"

This interest in the question of his food supply was kindly intentioned, of course, but decidedly annoying. The man had expressed great surprise at the fact that the stranger brought only crackers and cheese from the grocery in Truro. Elliot Small hadn't explained that he didn't want to consider food yet—not even to give it a thought; that he just wanted to get to the house, *his* house, and riot in its solitude.

"And when you get lonesome, you can go to the top of that hill there and watch the cars passing on the road. Autos is lots of comp'ny, I tell my wife. Too bad this house is so far from everything! You're liable to get pretty lonesome."

Small was goaded beyond endurance.

"Lonesome!" he barked. "I came here to be lonesome! I bought this house to be lonesome in. It's what I want worse than anything else, and I want to start being it right away!"

He was trembling visibly, and a flush had banished the sallowness from his thin face. Hastily slapping his horse with the reins, the disconcerted native drove off with as much speed as the animal could muster through the thick sand.

As he was about to turn behind the house, the color suddenly left Elliot Small's face.

"Thank you," he said in a politely modulated voice. "Thank you—call again."

The man didn't hear him, and apparently he hadn't spoken to be heard. The words seemed to have been uttered instinctively, as the result of long-established habit. Then he sank limply to the steps, and, taking off his hat, mopped his face with a green silk handkerchief. It was wet with perspiration, though a cool breeze blew in from the bay, a segment of which showed bluer than the sky through that dip out there in the dunes.

The stunted apple trees around the cottage were pink with bloom, and everywhere were the snow and the fragrance of wild plum. As he took it all in, Elliot Small was like a lank and quaking horse newly turned loose in a perfect paradise of a pasture.

The city harness was still upon him in the shape of one of Stacy's nattiest thirty-nine-dollar pin-striped suits, with necktie, socks, and handkerchief of the same indefinite green as the stripe in the suit. A new spring overcoat lay across his upended trunk, and all this sartorial harmony had been purchased at an employee's discount, for Elliot Small had been a floor-walker at Stacy's for ten years. For eight previous years he had been successively errand boy, wrapper, and clerk in that same

stupendous department store, which, on Saturday afternoons and special sales days, is no mean rival of the late battlefields of Europe in concerted charges, tramlings, and near-slaughters.

Small wonder that, transplanted to Cape Cod in May, he twitched with something closely resembling shell shock. A haze seemed to come over the landscape, so that he blinked rapidly and closed his eyes. The benevolent sun bathed his thinning red hair, his concave cheeks, his small sophisticated mustache, and his "successful" chin.

A physiognomist whom he had consulted had told him that it was a successful chin. A phrenologist had found his skull to abound in bumps of aggression, continuity, and executive ability. A palmist had assured him that he could distinguish himself in either literature or art. A course in Pelmanism had developed in him a "personality that pulls"—and yet his most strenuous endeavors hadn't succeeded either in making him one of the heads of Stacy's or in extricating him from its treadmill.

An aunt's legacy had brought about the latter miracle, just three weeks ago. His mother having died the year before, and all his sisters being married, there was no one left for him to support. He was free!

Contrary to popular tradition, his sudden release did not leave him dazed and hesitant. He proceeded at the earliest possible moment to get as far away from New York and Stacy's as he could. He had never got farther away than Rockaway before, and now he compassed Cape Cod. More than that, as if to multiply the distance, and to make certain that this world of freedom would not fade from his grasp, leaving him to find himself once more harried and hunted in the maelstrom that was Stacy's, he bought a house on the second day after his arrival, paying an eighth of his legacy for it.

He bought this particular house because it stood beautifully alone, two miles from the village of Truro, and not too near the water. The steady, futile splashing of the waves would have reminded him too much of what he had escaped, not to mention the querulous bickering of sea gulls over bargain bits of flotsam. More than anything he wanted quiet, perfect quiet. It was necessary, too, for his work, which was still more important than the peace of his nerves.

The house had four rooms, completely though simply furnished. It belonged, the agent told him, to a "literary man" who had gone to Europe for an indefinite stay. If anything were needed to clinch its desirability with Elliot Small, it was the fact that it belonged to a literary man. He signed the notes of payment at once.

"Yes, Elliot is a great reader," his mother used to tell visitors, in her sighing invalid's voice. "It's a shame he doesn't have more time to improve himself. You knew he wrote poetry, didn't you? There, now, I oughtn't to have mentioned that! He'd be awfully annoyed. His aunt out in Missouri is the only one he shows it to. Elliot's never liked the store, and if his pa hadn't died when he did—I declare it's too bad he couldn't have got an education!"

Yes, it was too bad, but her son meant to remedy all that now. His trunk was half full of books—a formidable assortment. He had gone to Brentano's, and, aided by the chief clerk, had picked out a hundred dollars' worth of classics which he knew an educated person should have read long before his age. He had been extremely particular to include no best-sellers, for, reasoned Elliot Small, ex-floorwalker, anything the general public liked was cheap and shoddy. They were responsible for bargain days, sleazy materials stylishly made up, bakelite bangles, colored glass beads—all the welter of mediocrity in which his life had been set.

To make assurance of culture doubly sure, he intended to order right away the "Pocket University" and Dr. Eliot's "Five Foot Shelf."

By twenty minutes each day spent on the "Pocket University," three hundred great teachers will place you in the college-trained class.

He brooded over the circular in awe. If that was true, even now, at the age of thirty-five, he could make up for those wasted years at Stacy's; but how much he had to learn! He must hurry, hurry!

Everything was happening so easily, so simply! The goal for which he had striven so long in vain had abruptly moved up to meet him, propelled by Aunt Jennie's thirty thousand dollars. That goal meant leisure and solitude—magic words that had rung sirenlike in his harassed brain for years.

There had never been any solitude for Elliot Small, even outside the store and working hours. His four sisters had been

slow in marrying, the family flat was small, and his mother was a steady talker. She had had a stroke when Daisy, the middle girl, married a man whom Mrs. Small stigmatized as "that Dago confectioner," and she hadn't been strong since, so she must be humored and stayed home with. As a desperate defense against her garrulity, Elliot took to reading aloud to her—popular fiction, mostly.

She was particularly fond of stories of young girls, or impeccable young men, alone in New York. She shed sympathetic tears over their forlorn isolation in furnished rooms, while her son was torn with anguished envy of them. How wonderful it would be to return each evening to a place where no one spoke to you! He could endure the day with fortitude, no matter how nerve-racking, if after it was over he could pull the mantle of aloofness about him and retreat into himself. No such thing was possible in the flat on East Fortieth Street.

And it was worse after his mother died, for then Daisy and "the Dago confectioner" came there to live. They gave noisy parties, during which Elliot Small would sit out on a park bench. In the small hours he would steal home, where the party might still be going on. Daisy, who had always been the rowdy one of the family, would drag him forcibly into the vortex of foreign and domestic babble, and would tell all Enrico's friends how queer he was. He couldn't talk, he couldn't play cards or dance, he hated drink and the radio.

That year was the worst of Elliot Small's life. Sometimes he feared he was going crazy. Then Aunt Jennie, whom he had seen only a few times, but who had mysteriously understood him, died out in Missouri and left him all she had. Aunt Jennie, from her grave, presented him with life.

How terrible if he had dreamed it, and should wake up to find himself back in Stacy's! He jerked open his eyes. No, it was all here still—the sky, the blossoms, the dunes.

Sighing quiveringly, like a child who has cried very hard and then has forgotten what it was about, he got up and unlocked the front door of his house. The sun was low, and the breeze had a slight nip in it. He must get settled for the night. He stood for a minute on the threshold, smiling happily, before going in.

In the living room there were many shelves for books, and a big fireplace. After hours spent in putting things to rights, followed by a supper of crackers and cheese, he lay back in the Morris chair before the driftwood fire with an "Anthology of Poetry" open on his knees. He fell asleep there at length. The fire subsided into embers, and the prying fingers of the night rattled the shutters of the house which only yesterday had belonged to a "literary man."

II

"HEY! Want to ride?"

Elliot Small gave a nervous start as the car slowed up in the road beside him. Its driver was the third to accost him with a similar invitation since he started for Truro with a market basket on his arm. He merely shook his head as he trudged on. He had been polite to the others, but, thank God—Aunt Jennie, rather—he didn't ever have to be polite to any one again unless he wanted to.

He threw back his head, breathing deeply. A gray sky hung low over the green earth, but the mere damp freshness of the air was an adventure. Having breakfasted on the rest of the crackers and cheese, he had realized about the middle of the morning that he was very hungry and must buy food at once. He dreaded the errand, for he had a passion to escape human contacts, no matter how brief and perfunctory.

The stolid indifference of the old Portuguese grocer was gratifying. Only when he had wrapped up Elliot's bundles did he come to life.

"They're too heavy for you to carry," he said, "and I don't deliver. How do you manage?"

His customer was loading the market basket.

"Oh, that's all right—I'll carry them."

"It's a long walk where you live. I can send them by some one who passes."

"No!" said Elliot Small emphatically.

He would risk no intruders into his solitude, to linger talkatively as the expressman had done yesterday. Shuddering at the memory, he strode off, bent far to one side with his load.

So the grocer already knew where he lived! He had always heard that country communities were gossipy. Well, he would give this one little enough material for talk. He would keep away from every one. Lit-

tle did he realize that this course would in itself furnish the amplest of material.

Cutting across the fields on his way home, he became involved in a maze of sandy gullies and scrub pine, and by the time he reached the cottage he was completely exhausted. But the food was the best he had ever eaten. Never had he dreamed that corned beef, canned tomatoes, and tea could yield such gustatorial ecstasy.

After lunch he went down to the bay. The sun had come out, and the kind waves did not splash, but only lapped gently at the shore. The gulls were beautiful high flashes in the sky. His physical weariness brought about an unwonted nerve relaxation, and he lay on the sand without thought, with only a hazy acknowledgment that life was being good to him—at last.

In the days that followed, Elliot Small tasted, like an epicure, the wonderful soft calm of evenings when he wasn't tired and didn't have to go to bed, the exquisite luxury of sleep-satiated mornings. He gradually rose earlier, however, for there was so much to be accomplished—long walks across the cape to the ocean, other walks following half obliterated wood roads in the little forest of scrub pines, much lying on hillsides in the sun. He couldn't get over a hysterical fear that all this would be taken from him, that he must hurry, hurry about enjoying it.

The rainy days he spent before his driftwood fire, reading or writing, and many careful pages were folded into long envelopes and mailed in the village. The "Pocket University" and the "Five Foot Shelf" had duly arrived, and now confronted him impressively from their shelves—"a complete education," he told himself gloatingly, literally within hand's reach. He looked up at them now and then, promising to begin on them soon—as soon as he got a few little things off his chest. Perhaps he'd better order Wells's "Outline of History," too, just to be sure that he had *everything*.

He wore the pin-striped suit no more, but a correct set of outing clothes. He highly approved of himself in flannel shirt and knickers, with golf stockings that had just the proper touch of color at the knees. He had always longed passionately to wear sport things, but he had been unwilling to compete with the myriads of other weekday prisoners for a place in the Sabbath sun. To hurry for crowded ferries and to

return late on crowded trains was a little too much like work to one who had rounded out six days on the main floor at Stacy's; so now the joy of outdoor life swept over him with all the force of novelty.

Most people would be lonely, he supposed. He took pride in the fact that he was not. At Stacy's people had always thought him queer, had resented his not entering more into the common life, that tense undercurrent of personal emotions flowing like hot lava beneath the glazed mechanism of the store. Men who amounted to anything in a creative way were always thought queer. He didn't need the things—personal relations and all that—that were the very breath of life to the others at Stacy's. He had something they didn't have, something that liberated him and set him apart. His poetry made for him an inner shrine where his real life burned in a clear, aspiring flame.

If it hadn't been for Aunt Jennie's legacy, his life would have been wasted in unfulfillment. To think that he had doubted God—had even doubted that there was a God, when all along this marvelous happiness had been planned for him! He prayed for forgiveness and inspiration.

III

ELLIOT SMALL lifted his head sharply from his reading. Yes, he heard it again—the rattle of his well chain and the soft splash of the bucket. Going to the window, he discovered a party of four people standing about the well and passing a cup from one to another.

He frowned heavily. The nerve of them—just as if they owned the place! He had been here for more than three weeks, and this was the first intrusion.

After staring curiously about, the strangers moved off toward the beach, carrying empty pails. What could they want down there? Elliot was too much upset to return to his reading, and decided to take a walk and find out; but before he could leave the house there came a knocking at the back door. He opened it on two Portuguese children, a boy and a girl.

"Say, mister, can we borrow your spade?" asked the girl.

He had learned to dread the Portuguese children in the village, because of their pertness and invincible friendliness. To have them come to his house! This matter must be settled at once.

"Why, no, you can't. Anyway, I haven't a spade."

"Yes, you have. Mr. Winthrop always let us use it. It's under the front steps—sort of a broken spade. We want it to dig clams with."

"Where are the clams?"

"Down there." Giggling at such ignorance, they pointed to the bay. "We'll give you some for lending us the spade."

"Well, get it," said Elliot curtly; "but please don't trouble me again."

He shut the door with a palpitating heart. Those other people must have been going to dig clams, too. One of the men carried a funny little wooden rake. Why should they have chosen this particular part of the beach, when there were so many miles of it? If it happened again, he would warn them off—though technically, of course, he didn't own clear to the beach.

This Mr. Winthrop must have been an obliging, gregarious sort of person. Some of Elliot's respect for him as a literary man oozed away.

There was more knocking at the back door—those terrible children wanting a pail for his clams. He gave it to them at once, for he was, to tell the truth, extremely fond of clams. After this, of course, he would get his own. It might be well to go and see how they were dug.

He was astounded to find a dozen or more people down at the beach. The tide was at its lowest, and they were out on the bars, digging absordedly—men, women, and children. A native fisherman walked up the beach toward Truro, carrying a full pail. Elliot hurried after him.

"Say! Hey, there—wait a minute!"

The man turned a bronzed and immobile face as Small came up, panting.

"Say, can you tell me why all these people are here digging clams?"

"Because this is where the clams is," the man replied with simple clarity, shifting his pail to the other hand.

"But aren't they everywhere along the beach? You can't mean that the clams of the entire district are concentrated here?"

"Well," said the expressionless native, looking off to a solitary sailboat, "there do seem to be a few the other side of Provincetown, and there used to be some about a mile south of Wellfleet; but this is the only regular bed I know of anywhere near."

"Bed! Do they stay in beds?"

"Sure!"

The man's eye returned to Elliot's, and a grin seemed to ripple beneath the weathered, durable surface of his face.

"How long do they live—I mean stay—in one bed?"

"Always, I guess. Indians used to dig 'em here before the white men landed. You can see their shell heaps over there in the pines, where they roasted 'em. There's no exhausting this bed—just as many after the whole country's been digging here as there was before."

"The whole country!" cried Elliot Small, clutching at his heart.

"Yes," said the man with pride. "Every one comes here to dig, even from as far down as Chatham. Must be fine to live as close to the bed as you do. A fellow can about live on clams. Now that the season's opened up, the summer people 'll be here a lot. You won't be lonesome no more. They think it's fun to dig 'em. I call it work. Guess they would, too, if they—"

But Elliot had heard enough. Turning away, he walked blindly up the beach. The sun didn't shine for him any more, nor did the colorful blandishments of this divine day exist. The snake had entered his paradise in the form of a clam—myriads of clams—so many that their number was the same after the whole country had been digging them as before! "The whole country"—they would borrow his spade, drink from his well, and use his place as a thoroughfare from the road to the beach. They would utterly destroy his precious solitude.

The Portuguese children came toward him, lugging a heavy pail between them.

"Here's yours! They're good ones. We got 'em on that farthest bar, where they're white and big, 'stead of close in, where they're black and little."

Elliot Small's hand described an arc of rejection.

"Thank you," he said brokenly, "but I don't eat clams. They don't agree with me—that is, they wouldn't now. You can keep them—and the bucket and spade, too. Oh, that's all right!"

He walked away, to hide himself in the cottage, stricken and anguished.

IV

"Do you suppose he is?" "Well, they say he—"

Feminine voices carried to Elliot Small in the kitchen, where he was endeavoring to assemble a custard pie. He dropped the

spoon in his annoyance. Through the window he caught a glimpse of two girls on their way to the beach, with the inevitable bucket between them. In their diminishing chatter he caught the one word—"crazy."

So people were beginning to think that of him, were they, merely because he refused to talk to any one and was letting his hair and beard grow? Well, so much the better! Might as well give them a look at him, to clinch the impression. He went out on the front porch, and noted joyfully that when the girls saw him they quickened their pace. Could they possibly be afraid of him? This was wonderful!

Going back into the house, he confronted his reflection in the bedroom mirror approvingly. Funny how wild a little extra hair could make one look, especially if it was red hair! He was a much changed man since that terrible day when he learned about the clam bed. A fuzzy inch-long beard ambushed his tanned features, and his hair was evolving from the regulation clipped style into a boyish bob.

As the summer waxed, so had the number of visitors to the clam bed. Their constant intrusions were simply maddening. His well, it seemed, afforded the only fresh water within a radius of a mile or more, and all clam diggers were afflicted with a chronic and raging thirst. Their voices, accompanying the creak of the pulley and the splash of the bucket, infuriated him. The polite ones were still worse—those who insisted ceremoniously on knocking and asking his permission to drink. They were itching for conversation, wanting to know where he was from, whether he knew their cousins or uncles in Brooklyn, what he thought of the climate of Cape Cod, and how long he intended to stay. He had finally made it a rule never to answer the door, and, if waylaid for conversation, merely to shake his head. Above the well he hung the admonition:

Drink, if you must, but be quiet about it.

He began to be aware of whisperings behind his back in the post office at Truro, and of the taunting singsong of children. They called him "Old Deef an' Dumb," "Reddy," and "Bats." He marveled greatly at rural human nature. To think that a mere aversion to society could make one so conspicuous! But it was all to the good, if only they let him alone in his cottage.

It did finally begin to look as if that ideal state had ensued, for he was troubled less and less by intrusions; but the number of people passing at a short distance showed a marked increase. A perpetual procession of figures—or so it seemed to him—rounded the top of the dunes, with necks craning toward the cottage in the hollow. He pulled down the curtains, and tried to pretend that his persecutors didn't exist.

In spite of his worries, physically he was a new man—heavier, firmer, and with a wonderful feeling of vitality. He bathed in the bay every day, going to a place around a bend from the odious clam bed, where he sunned himself, tried out swimming strokes, and forgot everything but the childlike delight in nature that was always with him.

Lying like a log on the sun-baked beach, he was absorbed into a vast, cosmic geniality in which he didn't mind anything very much, not even the clam bed. After all, clams had much to recommend them—silence and a retiring disposition. He felt a wave of sympathy for them. He felt it for every living thing except people.

Elliot Small had never had much sympathy for people—there had always been too many of them around. As for love, or falling in love, he simply didn't know what it was. There were nice girls in the store, of course, but none of them had registered on him emotionally. Subconsciously, he had fought against having the realm of his affections bounded by Stacy's, as was the rest of his life. He had an ideal woman whom he considered his secret bride. Her features varied from time to time with his standards of feminine beauty, but always she had deep black hair and a languorous grace. A thorough woman of the world, he strove constantly to reach her level of culture and sophistication. Some day he might meet her in the flesh, this mental image he had set up. Perhaps he would meet her through his poems; but this part of the dream was too sacred and thrilling to dwell on, except at rare intervals.

Back at the cottage, moods of blandness and introspection were impossible to attain. He dreaded to glance from the window, for fear of seeing some one passing and—of course—staring. Occasionally, when he went to the well, heads bobbed up from dunes and bushes. Even when he saw no one, he had the feeling that he might be watched from hidden vantage

points. Almost would he have welcomed the frank, loud-voiced intrusions of the earlier days. There was something uniquely disconcerting in this silence that had eyes, this seclusion that was peopled.

His writing suffered, and that filled him with the chill of panic. His verses sounded flat and stale, and often there was nothing he wanted to write about. He could watch the gulls in late evenings dipping into a flat sea of opal without being fired to the struggle of setting it down on paper. He could gaze on the moon's silver path across the water without aching to give form to the phantasies that traversed it. His dream world had retreated wistfully into the background.

The regularity with which his self-addressed envelopes came back to him taught him the pangs of self-distrust. Perhaps his stuff was rotten. If only they would say something, and not just send those printed slips! He had sent most of his verses to one magazine—a magazine which the subway crowds didn't read, and in which he had often seen verses that he liked. Elliot banked on that editor. Surely he would know a good thing when he saw it.

When he couldn't write, he read more assiduously than ever; but it wearied him. There was so much he didn't fully understand, so much he wanted to ask some one about. It was harder than those fellows said to get a college education just by reading. He wondered if they had tried it themselves.

He had grown to dread the trips to Truro, and made them as seldom as possible. One day, when he went there after a ten-day interval, he found at the post office, besides the usual letter from Daisy, an accumulation of four big envelopes. This was terrible! He turned away from the window in a dry-mouthed despair. As he walked along the village street, oblivious of his surroundings, little square slips of paper fluttered in his wake. A group of children followed him, chanting:

"Crazy man, crazy man, whiskery old hermit!"

He scarcely heard them. Four rejection slips! He hurried toward home, to be alone with his suffering. Were big things about to betray him, as the little things had done? Was God making sport of him, as well as man?

He had come to Truro by the beach, but he returned by the road, to hasten the

journey. When within about two hundred yards from where he would turn off for the cottage, he saw a sight beside the road that rooted him in his tracks. It was a shack, a brand-new shack with a roofless porch, and over the door hung a large sign in black letters on a white ground:

HERMIT'S RETREAT TEA ROOM—CLAM CHOWDER A SPECIALTY

So he was being featured! He was being made a local attraction—he and the clams!

Bareheaded, as he always was, he stood staring at the sign. With wide, horror-struck eyes in the setting of that sensation-ally colored hair and beard, he did indeed look wild. A party of motorists passing sent up a derisive shout and sounded their horn repeatedly. He ducked like a rabbit into the scrub pine and made his way home across the pasture.

The tea room hadn't been opened yet, for carpenters were still working there. When it started, things would be infinitely worse than now. He saw himself filling the rôle of local wild man, exploited by all the boarding-house keepers for miles around. His cottage would probably become one of the features of the sight-seeing bus that left Provincetown every day for the haunts of the Pilgrims. Hordes of people would creep around it, staring, staring. He couldn't stay there. His life was ruined. The very means that he had taken to insure his privacy had brought about this intolerable state of affairs.

The only thing was to clear out. He would go back to New York, seek out a furnished room, and there get back the thing which had been stolen from him, the thing for which he had paid an eighth of his legacy. All the stories agreed that a furnished room was the haunt of an inviolable solitude.

He hated people—hated them now even more than before he was relieved from Stacy's. Perhaps some day he might be able to endure them, but in the meantime, till he recovered from this sickness of the nerves and of the spirit which they engendered, he must be lonely. He would be lonely! He would find that only authentic and thorough loneliness, the loneliness of urban crowds; and there, perhaps, he would be able to put across the thing in which he had failed here.

He clutched convulsively the sheaf of en-

velopes in his hand. He would see that editor in New York, and find out what was the matter with his poetry. The most important thing in life was to find out.

That evening a clean-shaven, sad-eyed young man in a pin-striped suit boarded the train at Truro for New York. The cottage was in order, its doors and windows were locked, and from its shelf the shelves of books looked down upon an empty Morris chair.

V

ELLIOT SMALL looked around the room with satisfaction. It was just like the ones described in the furnished room stories—simply horrible!

No sordid detail was missing. There was the chipped white iron bed with the sagging springs and the ragged counterpane, there was the dirty red and green carpet, there was the pock-marked mirror, there was the discolored wall paper.

He set down his suit case and took off his coat and hat, with an inner revulsion at thus coming closer to the room. He would wash up, go out and get some supper, and turn in early, for he was very tired. He approached the stationary washstand gingerly.

As he was drying his hands, he noticed that the door in the partition wall between his room and the next had no fastenings on this side. What was to prevent some one's entering from there? He tried the knob, and found it fast. Probably the door was nailed up on the other side, but he had an impulse to ask for another room. However, he shrank from a second interview with the landlady, whom he had mentally designated as "the woman in the iron mask," and decided to let things stand.

When he returned to the room after supper—eaten at one of those surgically white-tiled lunch rooms—he lighted the gas and sat down in the rickety base rocker to collect his thoughts. Then it was as if the room itself became articulate with the composite lament of all its former occupants; for there was an unmistakable sound of some one sobbing, apparently close beside him.

He had a momentary chill of terror before reason told him that the sound came from the next room. A woman was weeping in there, punctuating her sobs with gulps and catchings of the breath. It was the one touch needed to complete the at-

mosphere of the place, and Elliot felt cold-heartedly grateful to her for supplying it.

She kept it up for an amazingly long time. He had gone to bed and turned a dozen times or more, trying to locate the least uncomfortable spot, before she stopped. Then he fell asleep and dreamed that he himself was doing the sobbing in the post office at Truro.

The next day he spent in going over his poems, making changes here and there, and nerving himself for his interview with the editor. Again evening found him in the dusky room to which the city's noises penetrated as a vast, unending discord on some cosmic organ. Then came that other sound, a near and human one—soft, heartbroken sobbing in the next room.

Elliot Small lighted the gas to look at his watch. Beginning the same time she did yesterday evening, by George! Did the woman do a daily dozen of despair?

It began to look like it the next evening, when she started on schedule time again.

"Now this is the limit!" said Elliot.

Normally the most uncurious of people, he went to the keyhole and tried to peer through, but found that it had a shield over it on the other side. He told himself that he wasn't really interested. Then he began speculating as to what she was like, this victim of chronic grief. Such yielding to emotion made her seem immature, though he supposed women of all ages did the same thing.

That was the trouble about being a man—you couldn't deliberately turn loose and make the welkin ring with your despair. He would like to, God knew! His tearful neighbor couldn't possibly feel worse toward life than he did, though he was bearing himself with a heavy stoicism.

August in the city was hotter even than usual, and the air of the rooming house was as lifeless as if generated by those murky halls. At night, tossing between limp sheets, Elliot groaned at visions of the bay by moonlight, of the froth-edged wash of green waves over on the ocean side. In the daylight, he would not allow himself to visualize what he had left, except to contrast gratefully the unseeing indifference of city faces with those craning necks rounding the dunes by the cottage.

He hadn't gone to see the editor yet, for the simple reason that he didn't have the courage to do it; but on the fourth day after his arrival he concocted a plan which

would materially lessen the horrors of the interview.

About three o'clock he left the house with a bundle of manuscript in his coat pocket. The girl at the desk in the outer room of the magazine office seemed surprised at his expecting to see the editor without an appointment. She looked him over dubiously. Was he sure it was Mr. Hogarth he wished to see? Wouldn't Mr. Jackson do? But on Elliot Small's summoning a reserve of floorwalking hauteur, she disappeared behind a door, to return a few moments later and conduct him down a corridor to the door of the chief's private sanctum.

Inside, a small gray man at a desk invited him to be seated, with a sort of harassed cordiality. The editor was a high-brow—Elliot saw that at once—just such a man as he had expected him to be. If it hadn't been for the plan he had concocted, he would have been too frightened to converse. Money never intimidated him, but brains did.

"I've come," he said, "on an errand for a friend of mine, who lives out on Cape Cod. From time to time he has been sending you poetry, which has all been returned. This fellow's pretty badly worried about it, and he asked me if I would see you and find out what's the matter with his work. It means a lot to him, and—"

"I see," said Mr. Hogarth, with an apprehensive smile. "What is your friend's name?"

"Elliot Small—mine's Jones. I have some of his poetry with me right now." He fumbled desperately with the bundle in his pocket.

"Ah, yes—I see." The editor was no longer smiling. "Perhaps you'd like to leave it for me to look over later and write him about it."

"But haven't you read it *already*?" cried the visitor in surprise.

"Possibly," said the editor, "and possibly not. You see—"

Then he patiently explained the system by which readers weeded out the material submitted, a small part only coming to his personal attention.

"Oh!" The light of a great hope broke on Elliot Small's face, and he began unfolding the sheets in his hands. "Then I'd be greatly obliged if you could take a look at these right now—that is, *he* would. It would be awfully hard on him to have

to wait—he's had such a lot of worry already."

With an expression which seemed to say that it was only to save Mr. Jones's friend from an impending nervous breakdown, the editor hooked on his eyeglasses and took the proffered sheets.

"That first one I—*he*—put some awfully hard work on, and—"

But Mr. Hogarth was already absorbed in rapid reading. Elliot Small watched him with eyes that were mere blue points of anxiety. If only he wouldn't read so fast—turning the sheets so quickly and so perfunctorily! He couldn't get the real essence of that poem about the sea gulls, dashing through it like that.

He laid down the pages.

"These don't fit the needs of our magazine," said the supreme authority.

"Yes, I know—that's what the slip said; but how are they as poetry? Is anything the matter with them?"

"Yes, quite a bit," said the editor, taking off his eyeglasses and turning them between his fingers. He wasn't looking at his victim, but was gazing meditatively out of the window to his right. "The sentiment of these verses is commonplace, and so is their phrasing. Their form is pretty bad, some being neither free verse nor rimed meter. To be frank with you, there's very little I can say for your friend's work."

His eyes turned to meet Elliot's, and their detached, bored expression finished the murder that his words had begun. The face of the young man in the chair was the light biscuit color of a tanned face from which the blood has receded.

"Of course," continued Mr. Hogarth, laying down his eyeglasses, "I am speaking from a literary standpoint only. Your friend may have the making of a popular success, with a little training in versification. He hasn't the pervading cheerfulness of Edgar Guest, whom he somewhat resembles, and that is to his advantage if he takes up newspaper poetry. The public likes a catch in the throat, likes to feel that it is being deep and philosophical, even better than "the glad stuff." That's the suggestion this man Small gives—a sort of diluted pessimism. Yes, he might be popular with the general public."

He gathered the sheets together with an air of finality, and rose, smiling a dismissal. Elliot Small realized, as from an infinite distance, that the limp rag of a man

in the chair, who had once been himself, must also rise and go away.

"Thank you," he heard the miserable creature saying huskily, "for your opinion." His hands shook so badly that he could hardly fold the sheets and stuff them into his pocket. "You're quite sure he could never do the real thing?"

"With only these to judge by—quite."

Only these! And they had been wrung from their writer's very heart!

Elliot didn't remember, afterward, how he left the office and emerged into the street. He only knew that he walked for hours, as in a nightmare, automatically dodging vehicles and pedestrians, and that it was dusk when he returned to his room. He started to light the gas, then changed his mind, and sat down by the open window, burying his face in his hands.

He had nothing—less than nothing—to live for. He was and always had been a ridiculous, abysmal fool. Some things were too terrible to be borne, and having one's very soul built on a delusion was one of them. There was no God, of course, but some malign omnipotence had had great sport with him.

VI

As he sat there, he found himself waiting for something, listening tensely. He realized that he was waiting for the sound of sobbing in the next room.

His own terrible sorrow had to become articulate, or he couldn't bear it. Of all the heartaches that had sojourned here, surely none could have been more deep and crushing than his. Mere poverty and joblessness were nothing, if only one had self-respect and integrity of soul. He had neither, for until to-day he hadn't known what manner of man he was. He had thought himself so different from the ridiculous reality!

He wondered whether even if he had had a chance—if he had been at college, and had had advantages like regular fellows—he would have amounted to anything. He doubted it. He was true to his name—just a small person; and he had wanted so terribly to do something big!

The silent minutes dragged on. Surely the woman in the next room wouldn't fail him, when he so needed to weep vicariously. He lit a match and looked at his watch. Ten o'clock! She had never been so late as this before.

Perhaps things had brightened up for her. If so, Elliot ought to be glad. He was ashamed of not being glad. "Misery loves company"—what a true old saying, he thought!

It was in just such moods as this, he supposed, that people plugged up doors and windows and turned on the gas. They were probably people who, like himself, couldn't weep, and who found life unendurable without that relief. The gas method of suicide was surely simple in a place like this, where no one bothered you. He wondered if any one had ever done it in this room. The pipes were old and leaky, and there was always a slight odor of escaping gas.

By the way, wasn't it unusually strong right now? Elliot sniffed. It certainly was strong—almost sickening!

He got up from his chair by the window and moved toward the middle of the room, intending to open the hall door, to see if it was coming from that quarter; but opposite the door in the partition wall he was sharply arrested by a new thought. He put his nose to the crack. Yes! Oh, God, how terrible! That was why the poor creature next door wasn't crying!

Probably he couldn't force the door, but he would have one desperate try before he alarmed the house. Wrenching violently at the knob, he lunged with his whole strength against the door. It gave, and the superfluous force that he had exerted fairly hurled him into the next room.

"Oh!"

With the soft, gasping scream in his ears, he straightened up, still clinging to the knob, and confronted, in what seemed like a blazing light, a girl sitting up in bed, with a row of curl papers around her forehead. She stared at him with enormous frightened eyes. A book slipped slowly off the covers as one hand dragged them to her chin, and fell to the floor with a thud.

Elliot Small was struggling for the power of articulation. A window near the bed was open, he noticed—wide open—and he smelled gas hardly at all.

"I beg your pardon," he got out with extreme difficulty, one hand going to his collar; "but I thought something had happened—I thought—"

"What?" whispered the girl in the bed, as if hypnotized.

"I thought you were committing suicide. You see, I smelled gas, and I was

sure it was coming from here. One is always reading about such things happening in furnished rooms, and I thought—you see, you cry so much that—”

The girl was horrified.

“Can you hear me?”

“Yes. That’s an unusually thin door, I guess. I seem to have broken the catch—just thumb-latched, wasn’t it? I’ll have it fixed for you to-morrow. I’m awfully sorry.”

His eyes were riveted to the lock on the door, while his spirit groveled under the knowledge of his utter ridiculousness. He was a fool in cap and bells who had never known till to-day that he was a fool, and this last stunt of bursting into a strange woman’s room was the apex of his folly.

“Won’t you sit down for a minute?”

He turned to see the girl standing in the middle of the room in a blue cotton kimono, with worn house slippers on her feet. She was smiling a funny, jerky smile which Elliot Small knew, in his abyss of humiliation, would have been a hearty laugh at his expense if she hadn’t cried so much that this was the nearest she could come to laughing. One hand fumbled with the curl papers, while the other pointed to a chair near the window.

Elliot moved to the chair submissively. Perhaps she intended to call the police and have him arrested—he didn’t care. He saw, as in a dream, that the room was very much like his, her feminine efforts to brighten it having only served to accentuate its horrors. An alarm clock ticked insistently on the bureau.

The girl sat down in the other chair.

“I guess I ought to explain some more,” he said wretchedly.

“Oh, please don’t!” she replied, and nervously began to pleat the front of her kimono in folds.

In the speechless interval that followed, he decided that she was almost homely, with her large mouth and short nose, and those funny white wads about her forehead. Why didn’t she say something, if she wasn’t going to let him apologize? They couldn’t sit here in this frightful silence, which still seemed to ring with his tumultuous entrance.

For at least a minute longer he watched her pleating and unpleating the front of her kimono, before it dawned on him that here was a woman utterly unique in his experience—one to whom words came hard.

“I’ve often thought of doing what you thought I had done!” she finally blurted.

“Oh, no!” he protested. “Suicide is wicked, you know!”

“Oh, is it? Well, if you had to work at Stacy’s, and were dead tired all the time, you might not think it was so wicked!”

She was alarmingly intense.

“Well, perhaps not,” he conceded.

“How long have you been there?”

“A year. I planned to be a school-teacher, but when my uncle died—he was my only relative, and I lived with him in West Hurley—there wasn’t any money, so I couldn’t finish school. There wasn’t any work in West Hurley, so I came here, and Stacy’s was the best I could do.”

It had been the best he could do, too—the best he could ever hope to do, for all his delusions of superiority. He might as well go back there to-morrow.

“But it isn’t living—going there every day and coming home dead tired at night. I hate it so! And I haven’t any friends.”

No, she wouldn’t be a success with the crowd at Stacy’s—he could see that. Each of the girls there cultivated her own particular “line” in dress, manner, and repartee. Smartness was their watchword and a glazed artificiality their goal. This girl had no “line,” and Stacy’s would unanimously class her as a hick, from her unbobbed head to those worn black Ox-fords at the foot of the bed.

“I’ve been so lonely,” she was saying, “that there didn’t seem to be any use in living!”

“Lonely!”

Her listener gave a short, bitter laugh. Then the irony of his struggle for solitude, in order to produce poetry that was hopelessly rotten, simply overwhelmed him. He put his hands to his face and groaned.

“Why, you’re sad, too, aren’t you?” he heard a warm voice saying.

He nodded his head.

“Is it something you can tell? If you can, it might make it easier.”

“It’s nothing,” he said, looking up at her and assuming a desperate pose of calousness, “except that I’m a failure—a rotten failure.”

“Did some one say you were?”

“Yes.”

“Who was it?”

“The editor of a magazine.”

Why didn’t he resent her inquisitiveness? He knew why when he saw how tense she

was with sympathy as she sat hunched toward him in the blue kimono.

"Oh, do you *write*?"

Her awe forced him to unplumbed depths of self-contempt.

"I thought I did."

Then, suddenly, he found himself telling her all about it. He was amazed at himself, unutterably amazed that he could open his heart to a total stranger; but he couldn't help it, and didn't want to help it. He just poured everything out, even the horrible fact that he, too, used to work at Stacy's. He told her of his family life, of the legacy, and of the buying of the cottage at Cape Cod. He omitted no details of the tragedy of the clam bed. It was surprising that a woman who craved human companionship badly enough to weep for it evening after evening should understand his struggle for solitude; but she seemed to do so. That was the marvelous part—she seemed to understand.

When he came to his poems and the editor, she was all excitement.

"And you let *one* man, one single man, influence you that way? How do you know he *knows*? He may be wrong."

"Oh, he knows, all right," said Elliot Small sadly. "There's no use my trying to be the real thing—it's too late. If I was going to write real stuff—real highbrow stuff—I ought to have had an education; and maybe even then—"

"Can't you get an education now?"

"No, not a regular one. That's bunk!"

All the concentrated bitterness of wrestling with the "Pocket University" and the "Five-Foot Shelf" was in his tone.

"Can I see the poems?"

He winced sharply.

"No, I couldn't bear to show them to any one."

Then, as he looked at her regretful, selfless face, he knew that he *could* show them to her, that he even wished to show them to her, just as he had wanted to sob out his childish troubles on his mother's lap.

She seemed to read it in his face.

"Get them now," she begged.

He rose. Then, prompted by the peculiar stillness all about, he looked at the clock, and was appalled to find that it was close to midnight. To think of his talking all that time! And she had to work tomorrow!

"Oh, I don't mind!" she said eagerly. "If you only knew how much it's meant

to talk to you! I'm *glad* you broke in that door!"

That brought him up with a jerk. He thoroughly respected the conventions, and this situation was almost—almost improper. He backed hastily through the doorway, murmuring:

"To-morrow night, if I may."

He carefully pulled the door to behind him. A moment later he came to the crack to say:

"Oh, by the way, that escaping gas was in my room. Seems I forgot to light it after I turned it on. Lucky the window was open, wasn't it?"

"Good night!" she called, and laughed.

To think of hearing laughter from that room!

What was this strange peace that enveloped him as he went to bed, folding him there in the dark with wings of healing? Everything was just as bad as before. His life was still ruined; but telling his troubles had marvelously eased the pain. Could it be possible that in his distaste for crowds, his dread of indiscriminate contacts, he had been too aloof from humanity? Or was that girl in there, whose very name he didn't know, unique in her sympathy and understanding?

He had never met any one like her. He felt terribly sorry for her. She was meant to have a home, she was so obviously just a home girl, and probably she would never marry. Most men would pass her by without a glance, to fall for the chic and flashy. Probably she would have to spend all her life working hard for a living and weeping with loneliness. It wasn't right! She was the only person he had ever genuinely pitied.

VII

"THEY'RE all beautiful," she said with a sigh; "but I simply *love* this one about the sea gulls. Your calling them 'flashes of inspiration in a sea of thought' is so deep and fine! And that one about sunset on the bay—I can just see it! You really paint word pictures."

The editor was right! His stuff was only for the popular taste. Though he liked this girl—the longer he talked to her the more he liked her—he was not blinded to the fact that she was far from intellectual. She was just a fair representative of the general public, that trash-reading, trash-buying mass that he had so scorned. Why, then,

should a warm glow creep over him from his head to his heels because she felt just as he had felt when he wrote his verses?

"There's something sad about your poems," she said. "They make one think."

Again the editor was vindicated.

"There's one thing I forgot to tell you," he said. "Mr. Hogarth thinks I could do newspaper poetry. He said I have the making of a popular success."

"Then why, *why* are you sad?" She was bewildered and amazed. "I'd a thousand times rather reach all those millions of readers than just a little group of highbrows. I hate highbrows. I think they're silly."

What was the use in trying to explain to a girl with a mental outlook like this the difference between the real thing and junk? She could never understand; and yet that inexplicable warm glow remained, for she saw Elliot's stuff as he had seen it. Could there possibly be compensations for a cheap popularity? You did make people feel, even if they were only ordinary people.

They had been talking in her room for two hours. She had made some fudge by the heat of a can of Sterno, and the sheets of his poems were scattered all about. She wore a pink linen dress, and her hair was fluffy. After all, she wasn't unattractive.

Elliot Small still pitied her intensely, however. She wanted so few things from life—just the everyday happinesses, a home, a fireside, some one to love—she had enumerated them to him with utter frankness. She ought to have them. She ought to meet a man who wasn't in love with a romantic ideal, for she would make him a wonderful wife and a good pal. That's what she was—the good pal sort of girl.

"I've just thought of something funny," she told him with a smile. "You don't even know my name yet!"

"No—that *is* funny!"

"It's Rosalind Ellis."

"Why, that's a beautiful name," he said feelingly. "It's a romantic-sounding name."

He looked at her a little differently since he knew she had such a name.

Just then there came a knock at the door.

"Come in!" said Rosalind Ellis, surprised and hesitant.

The landlady—the woman in the iron mask—entered, closing it behind her. She bore no gifts of clean towels, and her air

was purposeful yet furtive. The girl's eyes met Elliot Small's in a disconcerted glance before the landlady spoke.

"So that's it, is it? I thought for a while you might be old acquaintances met up accidental."

She looked from one to the other with a loathsomely confidential expression in her small eyes, which seemed to peer from behind her corrugated face rather than to belong to it.

"Why, I—that is—" began the girl, blushing.

"Oh, you needn't bother to think anything up! I was on as soon as I seen you'd opened that door. I must say I was a little surprised—you been so quiet and demure ever since you come." She gave a short, rattling laugh. "Still waters run deep, as the saying goes. Only you prob'ly understand the rules—you pay more for privileges like this."

Elliot Small and the girl were staring at her in utter mystification. Now their eyes simultaneously traveled to the fudge pan, and their faces took on looks of sheepish guilt.

"But we didn't use your gas," said Rosalind Ellis. "We cooked it with Sterno."

It was the landlady's turn to be mystified. For a moment she looked questioningly at the brazen pair. "Oh, can the innocence stuff!" she said then, with a touch of irritation. "I ain't got time to argue here all night. I want to get to bed. It's twelve a week if you bring men in, whether you get 'em on the street or here in the house!"

Elliot Small sprang to his feet, his face swarthy in a fierce blush.

"But I can't afford to pay twelve dollars a week," said the girl, in troubled bewilderment. "I didn't know I couldn't have company."

At the spectacle of her pathetic blindness, his whole being was swept by a fierce surf of feeling that washed away the last shred of his detachment from the common ways of life. He stepped in front of Rosalind protectingly, his fingers twitching.

"What do you mean," he inquired of the landlady in a low, masculine growl, "by insulting my *fiancée* this way?"

"*Fiancée*, huh! Well, of course, that's different." There was exquisite sarcasm in her tone. "Only I'd say that under the circumstances the quicker you had the ceremony, the better!"

"Get out of here!" he said in a choking voice, "and do it quick!"

He took a step toward her with hunched shoulders and livid face.

"Oh, *all right!*"

She opened the door slowly, then slipped through and slammed it behind her in prompt retreat.

"Oh, did she think *that?*"

Rosalind's face was quivering, outraged, and she began to cry.

In the moment in which Elliot Small stood looking down at her, another dream

went glimmering out—the dream of that sophisticated woman with raven hair, ethereal tastes, and mysteriously uplifting qualities, fit mate for the great poet who had preceded her by one day into the dark limbo of unreality. He came and laid his hand on the shoulder of the "good pal sort of girl."

"I want to take care of you," he said huskily. "You oughtn't to be alone. Why can't it be true what I told her? Let's get married to-morrow, and go to live in my cottage on Cape Cod!"

A Woman from Denver

THE STORY OF A MOONLIGHT NIGHT ON THE ROAD ALONG
THE ROMANTIC COAST OF THE RIVIERA

By Eleanore Browne

BECAUSE I dropped my handkerchief, and because a stray shaft of moonlight, on its way down to the sea from over the Alps, came through the open door to rest on it while it lay on the floor, I heard about her—a woman from Denver; or perhaps it was because men are prone to talk of strange things, and women to listen, when the moonlight night is quiet, with the scent of many flowers in the air.

"It is a pretty handkerchief, *signora*," said the man, when he picked it up and put it into my hand. "May it never hold a tear!"

He misunderstood when I looked up so quickly into his face.

"*Perdonatemi, signora!*" He was almost abject in his dismay. "It was not to offend! It is but that I was reminded of another time, and of another handkerchief so very much like that one. She dropped it just there, not only once, but two, three times; and the moonlight was coming down from the mountains that night, also. You forgive?"

He turned away abruptly, without waiting for my assurance that he had only surprised me—that I had wondered if there were aught of the sententious in his whim-

sical gallantry. At his document bench, under a hanging oil lamp, he busied himself with my passport, that I might proceed along the road from Monte Carlo and Mentone—the steep, winding road that Napoleon's engineers built over the yellow rocks—into Italy.

He was keeper of the Italian customs station that stands alone on a high promontory overlooking the Mediterranean, at the French frontier. My car and its driver waited outside. We may have been the only travelers on the road that night to break the monotony of his vigil.

When he handed me my passport, with its fresh stamp and visa, he would have said, "*Buona notte, signora*," quite stiffly, if I had not asked:

"Will you not tell me something of her—of the one who also dropped her handkerchief here?"

His kindly old face, as wistful as the solitude of many nights in the wayside customs station, lighted up. Not often, it seemed, did he have some one from the busy world to talk to.

"But would the *signora* wish to hear? It is but a foolish memory that came back again."

I told him that memories that come back in the Riviera moonlight should never be dismissed as foolish.

II

HE drew his high stool away from the bench, and perched on it.

"It was such a night as this one, *signora*. I had thought it would be very quiet, for there were few travelers by road from France into Italy. Soon, however, it was alive with events.

"First a red car drew up, coming from the direction of Mentone. It was one of those that fly fast while they climb to the pass that opens the way to Turin or to Genoa. In addition to the driver, there was another man, and it was this other who brought in the passports. He was not a very old man, nor was he one who seemed young. When I had looked into his eyes, I decided that I would examine his papers very closely."

"Do you, then," I interrupted, "look into the eyes of all who bring you their passports?"

"You think it odd, *signora*? But you do not know, perhaps, that travelers who cross the frontier into Italy at night sometimes have strange errands. Often the eyes reveal what the passport hides. However, this man's papers were quite regular.

"*Benissimo!* You may pass," was all that I could say.

"When he had paid me my fee, he got back into the car, and I held my lamp that he might see to settle himself by the side of the driver. As he drew his cape around him, I heard him say to the one at the wheel:

"The road is clear to-night. If she is not delayed, she will meet us in Genoa at dawn."

"Then the car sped away, and soon it was lost to me. It might have been an hour that had passed when another car stopped. It was a young man that came in. He was a *signore Americano*—a countryman of the *signora's*. I liked what was in his eyes, though there was grief in them, also. It was easy to see that he was in a great excitement. With much passion he called out:

"When did she pass? How long ago?"

"I do not always answer questions, *signora*. It is my place to ask, not to reply; but I could see that he was troubled.

"Of whom," I said, "does the *signore*

inquire? Only one has passed to-night, and it was not a woman!"

"Almost the *signore* sprang upon me. Indeed, he caught my shoulders and shook them.

"She has not come?" he shouted. "You say but one has passed—a man?"

"He sank into the chair, and asked me about the red car. Something that made me think of death was in his face when I explained to him that the red car was headed toward Genoa. The something went away when I repeated that no other car had passed.

"Thank God!" he said, and sagged far down, his excitement quite gone. "She has saved herself—and me!"

"I keep a little brandy, *signora*, for the nights when it rains. I am not so young that it is good for me when I am wet while I look into the cars of travelers. I gave him a little of it, and he talked to me. Talking seemed to be a comfort to him.

"It was his wife, he said, who he thought had passed. He said much of her, but an old man can not repeat the words a young man uses when he speaks of the woman whom he loves. They are words that one must feel, as well as speak. Can it be, *signora*, that a woman's hair may be made of gold, or light from the sun, or the laughter of children? I remember that he said her hair was made from all of these beautiful things; but perhaps I did not rightly understand him.

"For three years, he explained, they had been married to each other—very happy years, he gave me to believe. They had come, he said, from their city in the *signora's* country to visit other places in the world. Have you not in your country, *signora*, such a city as Denver? It was the name he mentioned. He spoke as if I must know of it because she came from there.

"There is much tempting, I have heard, in the gay places that are close by here, to the kind of love that should never be. He had learned, most unexpectedly, that what he could not believe was near to coming true—that she had planned to follow the red car that night to Genoa, and on out of his life forever.

"I must hurry back to her," he said at last. "She will be waiting for me. I will not tell her what I know, for I shall take her back to our home, and we will both forget."

"Then he went out."

The old man stopped, to glance at the clock over his bench.

"Do I weary you, *signora*, with my recollections?" he asked. "I am but just come to the one who dropped her handkerchief here."

"Please!" I exclaimed, and he went on.

III

"THIS third car came just after. I do not understand why they did not pass on the narrow road between here and Mentone, but she said she had passed no one. She, too, was in a great hurry. She was very young. I remember I thought that other one—the one of whom the young man had talked—must be of the same age. While I inspected her passport, she sat in the chair, just where you are sitting, *signora*; and the moonlight that came in through the door was about her feet, just as it is about yours now.

"It is a pleasant night," I said to her, over my shoulder.

"I try always to speak with friendliness to those who wait while I am busy.

"Yes, *signore*," she answered.

"The moon is very bright to-night," I said.

"Yes, *signore*," she replied.

"You are traveling alone—with only your driver?" I asked.

"Yes, *signore*," she said again.

"I must ask your destination," I told her. "Would it be Genoa?"

"She did not reply at once, so I turned to her, thinking that perhaps I had not heard. I must be very particular to write down in my records the destination of those who pass. I saw that she had dropped her handkerchief, and was reaching for it. When she held it again in her hand, she corrected me.

"No, *signore*—I am turning off to the Col di Tenda. I go to Turin."

"That is well," I said. "At times there is danger on the road to Genoa, at night."

"Danger, you say, *signore*?" she exclaimed, a little concern in her voice.

"I did not wish to trouble her unnecessarily, for I was only thinking of the other woman. I quickly assured her that she would be safe on the road to Turin, which climbs to the Alps, far from the Genoa way, which skirts the sea. But she would not be so easily assured.

"Are you quite certain, *signore*," she asked, when I handed her the passports,

which I had put in order when I saw that the stamps of France were properly in place—'are you quite certain that if there is danger on the Genoa road, it will not be also on the other? I beseech you, tell me what this danger is!'

"What was there that I might do, *signora*? I could but relieve her of the fear that I had so foolishly aroused. I could not send her on her way with a fear!

"For you there is no danger," I said, 'on either road. I was but thinking, when I spoke so aimlessly, of another woman—one who almost went the Genoa way to-night, and for whom there would have been much distress. She would be a woman from Denver.'

"It was then that she dropped her handkerchief a second time. She did not pick it up at once, so I reached for it. I think it was the first time I ever held in my hand the handkerchief of a woman such as she. They are such little things, *signora*! Yet I have heard they sometimes hold many tears. I remembered I had heard this, when I picked up hers.

"A woman from Denver?" she repeated after me, when her handkerchief again was resting, with her hands, in her lap.

"I told her, then, of the young man who had talked with me so short a time before. I also told her how much I liked what I saw in the young man's eyes, and what different things I had seen in the eyes of a man who had passed in a red car.

"Are you always a good judge of what is to be seen in a man's eyes?" she asked.

"I could not answer this question affirmatively without seeming to speak better of myself than I should. It is only that sometimes I like what I read in the eyes, and sometimes I do not. Many times I may be mistaken. I told her this, and I saw that she was glad I would be just.

"This young man," she asked of me then, 'what did he say? How did he describe her—the woman of whom he talked to you?'

"Is it not odd, *signora*, that women are so curious? As I have explained to you, I could not repeat all the words the young man had spoken of his wife. They would not have sounded, from my lips, as they did from his; but I tried, very patiently, to repeat for her those that sounded as if they might be sensible. I asked her, as I have asked you, if it would be possible for a woman's hair to be made of gold, and

sunlight, and the joy of the young; but she did not answer. She had dropped her handkerchief again.

"I did not think to pick it up, so she studied it, with the moonlight on it, while I remembered all else that I could of what the young man had said. I do not think he would mind, if he knew. I would even think he might be glad to have others, even strangers, know of the perfection of the one of whom he talked.

"Once I thought the young woman was wearied, for she reached for her handkerchief; but it slipped from her fingers and dropped back again to the floor.

"Go on, please!" she told me.

"When I had told her everything that I could recall, she rose from the chair and thanked me. I liked what I saw in her eyes, as she turned them to mine. They were the eyes of a good woman, *signora*! I was glad she was not as that other foolish one of whom we had been speaking.

"When I gave her the handkerchief, which she would have left on the floor, I remembered again that I had heard how many tears such a little thing might hold, and I thought of the little gallantry, the same as I spoke to you.

"May this never hold a tear, *signora*!" I said.

"Then we laughed together—I, a great deal; she, a little bit.

"When she went out, she forgot to pay me my fee. Three *lire* twenty is more than I can afford to lose. I would have reminded her of it, but when I followed her to the car the thought of it was driven from my mind when I heard her say to the driver:

"You may turn the car around—and please hurry!"

"I was much distressed with the fear that I had kept her too long from her travels with my idle talk of the young man; but she had seemed to wish to hear.

"She did not forget my three *lire* twenty, after all. It was just before dawn when her car drew up again. There was only the driver, this time. He came in with a folded paper in his hand. In it there was my fee, with a little more besides, wrapped in the handkerchief that she had dropped so often upon the floor.

"I would have returned the handkerchief to the driver, but he had gone too quickly. When I opened it out, I saw that she had written on it. It was something that puzzled me, for I could not quite understand. Would the *signora* perhaps wish to see it?"

He bent over the wooden box that he kept under his bench, and brought it out from among many other things that were there—his souvenirs of other night travelers. It was still wrapped in the piece of hotel paper that she had perhaps found in her writing desk.

I looked straight into his eyes as he handed me the little package. He turned them away, but not too quickly for me to see that there was much of gentleness and of wisdom in them.

I spread the handkerchief on the bench, under the dim light, and read what she had hastily written, with a pencil, across the corner:

There are to be no tears for the woman from Denver.

NIGHT AND LOVE

WHEN down the flaming western sky

The great sun slips, a golden ball,

And grasses nod and insects call

And white moths through the meadows fly,

A benediction to my soul,

The night unrolls its mystic scroll.

And when I weary of delights

And jest and song and dancing feet,

Of pleasure's vital, vibrant beat,

Of stirring strain and thrilling sights,

A blessing all things else above—

The fond and sheltering arms of Love!

L. Mitchell Thornton

The Crystal Vampire

AN ADVENTURE OF JILL O' DIAMONDS, AN EXPERT IN A
PERILOUS AND QUESTIONABLE CALLING

By Florence M. Pettee

MME. DE VILLIERS needed a maid desperately. The urgency of her need was principally to blame for her unsuspecting and hasty employment of Jillette d' Iamant, *alias* Jill o' Diamonds, the cleverest thief out of knickers.

Madame appraised the girl through her platinum lorgnette, and found her not lacking. Jillette was exceedingly good to look upon; and even exalted platinum, abetted by polished glass, is not an infallible touchstone for revealing roguery, when that roguery is charmingly disguised under feminine loveliness and accompanied by just the proper deferential air.

Violet de Villiers need not have worried about her costly lorgnette, even had she dimly suspected the true calling of her new maid; for Jillette cared only for diamonds. No other gem could hope to tempt her—other valuables not at all. Indeed, even *madame's* diamonds were safe. Relieving an employer of the burden of worldly goods inspired no excitement, no mental gymnastics, no daring finesse. Easy, velvet-tipped adventure merely bored Jill o' Diamonds. Under her dusky and unruly bob she carried a *code d'honneur* of sorts—elusory, contradictory, feminine sorts. Real adventure was the playing of the game with all one's tempered skill. If luck stood behind the *croupier*, smiling on the spinning wheel—why, that was life!

The Crystal Vampire arrived shortly after Jill o' Diamonds entered the employ of Mme. de Villiers. A royal prince could not have been welcomed with greater homage; for the Crystal Vampire was the monarch of glittering stones. A guard on its sacred person, therefore, became both an obligation and a ritual.

It had been imported by Selig, the most exclusive jeweler off the Avenue. His emporium was an institution; his show windows were jewel cases for displaying the rare and the priceless. It was also whispered that the purple and silver marionettes, stationed outside, ostensibly to ease open limousine doors and to facilitate the disembarking of languid, lethargic ladies, were really showily appareled guardians of the law—the outside plain-clothes men of the shop.

Selig's care for the safety of his treasures had become a trade byword. During all the years of his suzerainty he had not experienced a single loss. His establishment was a Gibraltar for the world of gems, a rogue-proof repository for safeguarding the rich, the rare, and the precious.

The Crystal Vampire, therefore, had been imported by a jeweler skilled in the knowledge and the appraisal of stones, together with their adequate protection. He would have laughed to scorn the whisper that a slip of a girl, in her early twenties, was to plot, lone-handed, the whisking away of that costly and alluring diamond, the Crystal Vampire.

Perhaps Selig would not have scoffed had he suspected Jill's true antecedents and the nature of her early apprenticeship. It was old Ruys van Grandin who had taught her the love and the intricate knowledge of gems. She little dreamed, then, how great a part they were to play in her subsequent precarious destiny, when she was to snap her pretty fingers at the statutes of mere men, to become a law unto herself in her collecting of first-water carbon. Fine jewels were as much a part of her early training as were the crooked, cobbled streets, the humpbacked houses, and old Ruys,

with his hawkish nose, and his hands beautiful as a woman's, delicate as a virtuoso's.

Old Ruys was the master lapidary. No one in the little dike country bettered him in the ancient art of cutting, polishing, and setting stones. Little Jillette d' lamant grew up in a twentieth century stone age, living, breathing, loving diamonds. To her they symbolized the final, finite word in beauty.

Old Ruys taught her early that there was no crime like failure, no disgrace like inefficiency in one's chosen calling. A master at any profession was an artist, whether he scrubbed the crooked, cobbled streets, or took unto himself the property of others with distinction and finesse. Failure was the unpardonable sin, in old Ruys's debatable code.

II

FIVE days after the arrival of the Crystal Vampire, Mme. de Villiers summoned Jill o' Diamonds within her rose and gold boudoir.

"Bobbette," she addressed the girl, for so she had dubbed her, "this afternoon I'm leaving for the country home of Mrs. Tiverton. You'll accompany me. Mrs. Tiverton," she explained before the compelling, sympathetic gaze of the deft maid, "and I have a kindred hobby. We dote on diamonds."

Jillette made just the proper nod with her "*Oui, madame*"; but her slender fingers tightened the quivering fraction of an inch.

"Mrs. Tiverton is planning a *coup*," continued her new mistress; "and she knows my weakness."

Again Jill nodded. There was something signally flattering about the girl's breathless, intent interest. Somehow it invited confidences.

"I shall need, for the week-end, my wardrobe trunk, and"—Violet de Villiers gestured at her morning desk—"here's a list of my toilette requirements."

Jillette approached the spindle-legged desk speedily. As she stood at *madame's* plump elbow, she noted the heavily monogrammed note that carried Agatha Tiverton's bold, readable hand. During her mistress's precise and labored explanations, she read the letter twice. It ran thus:

DEAR VIOLET:

Selig told me privately of his recent importation of a wonderful diamond known as the Crystal

Vampire. He paid a king's ransom for the gem, and he calls it the stone of stones. It's reputed to wield a hypnotic influence over any one who sees it. Nonsense, of course; but I'm wild to buy the jewel and add it to my collection. Selig's price is prohibitive—ridiculous. Perhaps you and I can bring him to reason. I've already had a private view of it in his office. It's marvelous, beyond words—like a rainbow drop of dew. Its beauty catches in your throat. Wait until you see it!

I want you to come over for the week-end. I simply won't take no. Two heads are better than one, especially when driven by a mutual hobby. Send me word at once.

Accept my apologies for the lack of a personal maid. Marie has been called home by a serious illness in her family. I wish you would bring your "valet" along, and lend me her services until Monday. You see, you're doubly necessary.

Affectionately yours,

AGATHA TIVERTON.

The ghost of a dimple flickered about Jill's ripe red lips, to vanish on the instant.

"You're to maid me there, Bobbette," said Mme. de Villiers; "and—"

She hesitated for a second. Rueful experience had taught her the labyrinthian vagaries of servants' minds and their rock-ribbed rules of service.

"And would—would you—mind so ver-ry much—helping my friend, Mrs. Tiverton, over an awkward situation? Her own maid is away."

She gestured with a fluttering, fat hand, and looked timidly into the girl's charming face.

Jillette smiled back at her—a reassuring, rollicking, radiant smile.

"It would indeed be a great pleasure to serve *madame's* friend."

How was *madame* to guess that Jill's eagerness was inspired by a driving desire for Selig's perfect diamond? How was she to know that the reputed hypnotic power of the Crystal Vampire had already charmed another votary—and that a mere maid?

III

MME. DE VILLIERS sat *tête-à-tête* with Agatha Tiverton in the latter's morning boudoir. A little knock fluttered at the door. Jill o' Diamonds stood there. She addressed Mrs. Tiverton.

"Jeffrey states that a M. Selig is in the drawing-room. He asks *madame's* wishes concerning the gentleman."

"Ah, Selig!" the two women chorused, galvanized into instant interest.

"Make my excuses to Mr. Selig," hastened Agatha Tiverton. "Ask him, please,

if he'll be so good—so very good—as to permit me fifteen minutes. At the end of that time, have Jeffery show him up here into my sitting room.”

“At the end of fifteen minutes, *madame*,” smiled Jillette.

She shut the door noiselessly, like a deft shadow.

A quarter of an hour later Jeffrey knocked on Mrs. Tiverton's door. With him was a dapper little man, with keen dark eyes and a rosy face topped by bristling brows and an upstart mane of white hair. Heavy tortoise-rimmed glasses were perched on his masterful Roman nose. One noted the extraordinary beauty of his hands, fragile and white. Certainly they were admirably adapted to the gentle art of appraising jewels.

Within Selig's morning coat, under the protruding point of linen, reposed a satin case which held a gem that brought out with mesmeric sureness the good and the greed in men—that touched them into an insatiable desire for its possession. Selig had brought the Crystal Vampire concealed upon his own person, to be appraised by the dual wits of the two veterans in gem collecting who sat before him. To be sure, his personal secretary waited in the limousine outside. One little surmised that the secretary was heavily armed. Selig was taking no chances against an accident, although the arrangement for his present call on Mme. de Villiers and Mrs. Tiverton had been discretion itself.

Once the barrier was closed on Selig, Jillette dropped her servile demeanor like a cloak. She crept along the heavy velvet pile of the hall runner. She glanced back over her shoulder. The hall was clear, for Jeffery had vanished downstairs.

She eased the door of Mrs. Tiverton's sleeping chamber open, noting with a glance that the hinges, which she had been careful to oil beforehand, had absorbed the unguent. The door opened absolutely soundlessly.

Agatha Tiverton doted on velvet portières and tapestry hangings. The bedroom was a symphony in rose and gray. Smoke-tinted curtains of shimmering velvet draped its doors and windows. The gray hangings between the sleeping chamber and the sitting room had been carefully drawn by Jill. She wore one of Marie's matching gray uniforms, at Mrs. Tiverton's special request. This temporary mistress was a

stickler for the consistent carrying out of her pet color schemes.

As Jillette slipped in, the pet Pomeranian, Pompom, languidly uncoiled himself from the satin cushion beside Mrs. Tiverton's canopied bed, with its damask satin valance. A teakwood taboret stood beyond the dog. On the little table was a hammered brass breakfast tray etched in gorgeous dragons. A dainty breakfast set lay in scattered neglect upon it. Jeffrey was not due to clear it away for another hour.

Near the edge of the tray stood a covered glass with a spoon across it. The Pomeranian's midget body was swathed in a padded pink silk blanket. He breathed noisily, despite his mistress's attentive administering of the veterinary's potions.

Pompom studied Jill suspiciously. Would she, too, wind his muzzle with twine, and poke and prod him, as the strange man with the black bag had done? But on observing the familiar gray uniform of a mere maid, the Pomeranian sniffed disdainfully, yawned impolitely twice, and closed his red-rimmed eyes in sleep.

In a flash Jillette was across the sound-proof pile of the oriental rug. Like a mouse-colored linnet, she clung to the woodwork behind the gray portières. A tinge of pink suffused her oval cheeks. Her eyes were dark now—jet black. Adventure charged her blood with fire—beguiling, diamond-shod adventure.

Selig's voice filtered through the drawn portières.

“It's a marvel!” he enthused.

Jill's keen ear detected the sincerity of his tone. This man also loved diamonds surpassingly. Instantly she liked the dapper little jeweler.

“It's a perfect brilliant in cutting,” Selig continued, as if giving the pedigree of some hallowed departed ancestor. “It weighs thirty-six carats exactly. It's flawless—not a cloud or a feather. Its fifty-eight facets have been fashioned to bring out its perfect beauty, irrespective of the sacrifice of weight in the cutting. I've never seen a more perfectly cut brilliant or a more beautifully proportioned gem. The pavilion is a flawless two-thirds, and the crown is an exact remaining third of the stone. There isn't a facet on it that isn't sharply cut. I understand it took eight months from the rough stone to the present incomparable beauty of its finish!”

Jillette sighed ecstatically. She had never dreamed that circumstance would play into her hands like this. She had hoped for a peep at the stone, with a better acquaintanceship of it when she could appraise it from the close confines of a shop window; but here was Selig himself supplying every detail of weight and cutting before he produced the gem!

Jillette almost hugged herself. Again she smiled. Assuredly good fortune was lurking behind the *croupier* and smiling on the spinning wheel. Ah, this was life!

"But the stone, the stone!" urged Agatha Tiverton, evidently irked by the technical details that made up the Crystal Vampire's incomparable genealogy.

"Your pardon," bowed the little man, but he glanced appraisingly at Violet de Villiers. "In my enthusiasm I was recalling Mme. de Villiers's technical knowledge of stones, and her insistence on perfection in color, cut, and finish."

"Quite right, Selig!" approved Mme. de Villiers. "Mrs. Tiverton has little patience for these details."

Selig fumbled, and brought out his fine linen handkerchief. He spread it on the top of the satinwood table. Again he dipped into that made-to-order pocket in his morning coat. This time his white fingers produced a crimson satin case, like the hue of a ripe pomegranate. His touch was that of a pilgrim making obeisance and burnt offering before a shrine.

His supple fingers pressed the snap. The lid flew back with a crimson flash.

Simultaneous feminine "Ahs!" crept forth into the silent room. They were like the applause of an enthusiastic crowd before the revered presence of a monarch.

Noiselessly Jill leaned forward. Her breath caught in her slender throat. Dare she—

Curiosity and eagerness prevailed. Cautiously she eased back the gray velvet portières till a slender thread of light shone through.

Opposite the slit, the three stooped forward over the table. Upon it, winking and blinking, with all the nonchalance of some enchanting siren of old, lay a diamond which flashed that blue-white tint which is both the lure and the despair of every true diamond enthusiast. Half a dozen rainbows might have been pilfered to make up the galaxy of colors blazing forth from its perfect facets.

Selig had spoken truly—it was a stone of stones.

As Jill's dark, intense gaze clung to the radiant drop, everything within her seemed to crystallize in an overwhelming desire to possess the Crystal Vampire at any and all costs. The girl leaned nearer, almost burying her face in the soft folds of the gray velvet portières.

Then fate laughed gleefully at the unbridled impudence of a mere maid who coveted a rare diamond worth a king's ransom; and luck turned perverse and impish on the moment—shaking down from the soft folds of the drapery a rift of dust which had remained there, unseen by Agatha Tiverton or a dilatory servant.

Jill's finely cut nostrils quivered. She drew back hastily. She pressed against her upper lip in a desperate effort to check what seemed to be imminent.

Luck grinned broadly behind her back, and Jill o' Diamonds, to her horror and disgust, sneezed—not once, but twice—not loudly and indelicately, but sufficiently.

Beyond the portières a chair slithered back, and Selig's voice ripped out:

"What was that noise? Did you hear it, ladies—in the next room? Some one is spying on us!"

IV

JILL'S fate flashed with kaleidoscopic fickleness from siren blue-white to the dun brown of failure. Selig's swift stride approached across the unresisting pile of the perfect Bokhara. Behind him trooped two startled feminine figures, with Agatha Tiverton in the lead.

Like a frozen automaton Jill stood, awaiting the almost inevitable discovery. They couldn't be ten feet from the portières. Her eyes raced around the room, seeking a loophole of escape.

The door was impossible, for the huge canopied bed stood between her and it. The windows? The hangings were pushed back to thin tubes of gray. Besides, Selig would make a thorough search, unless—unless—

Her eyes went to the breakfast tray.

She stooped over and retrieved a little cut-glass object. Her hand flashed out. She poked the unconscious Pompom. He opened his red-rimmed eyes. Again her hand moved vigorously.

Then she doubled up like a jackknife. Her slender body slipped under the satin

valance of the bed. If they should make a search—

Selig flung back the monkish gray hangings. The ivory rings clicked like high heels on a polished floor.

Then the indignant Pompom, his nostrils still smarting from the pepper that Jill had dusted upon them, shook himself and sneezed repeatedly, disgustedly.

Agatha Tiverton laughed in sheer relief.

"Poor little pinkem-pinkem Pompom!" she crooned. "Is hims naughty-naughty cold bozzering him?" She turned to Selig. "I quite forgot him. He's been sneezing off and on all the morning. My poor little Pompom is your startling spy, M. Selig," she laughed.

Selig's bright, black glance studied the tiny, sniffing dog. He merely bowed slightly, and held back the portières for Mme. de Villiers to return to the hastily deserted Crystal Vampire.

"With your permission, ladies," he said, "we will now continue our consideration of the gem."

There was an imperceptible shrug to his shoulders as he glanced back at the Pomeranian. There was impatience, too. One read that he wondered how any one pretending to admire rare diamonds could, at the same time, own the canine apology in the next room.

Agatha Tiverton opened Pompom's mouth and poured down a teaspoonful of medicine. Then she, too, went back to the Crystal Vampire.

Their voices continued in subdued tones. It was as if they feared even the canine intelligence of Pompom, or the very walls themselves. Two minutes ticked by—three. The medley of words rippled on.

Jill o' Diamonds crawled out from the fluted valance of the great bed. On all fours she crept across the room, and cautiously she opened the door. Then, after a satisfying scrutiny of the corridor, she disappeared. The hint of a smile curved the girl's vivid pomegranate lips.

Late that night a dark-clad figure slipped down a giant wistaria, which had reached its gnarled growth after many years of attentive coaxing. The vine clung leechlike to the brickwork of the house, spreading out sturdy arms with bulging, dependable wooden muscles.

Clad in knickers, Jill descended the natural ladder, the top of which was within

vaulting distance from the shallow ledge of her third-story window. A huge maple tree dropped dappling shadows, screening the window and the vine.

She stepped lightly upon the resilient, close-cropped grass. In the shadows she listened warily; but only night was abroad, brightened by the brilliance of blinking stars. An occasional night owl taxi whirred by with rubber-shrouded tread. Otherwise the world and the house of Agatha Tiverton slept, quite unconscious of the midnight peccadillos of a demure maid.

Through the friendly tubes of many back alleys Jill crept, a slender shadow of shadows in her dark garments—her "night wings," as she called them. Once the emphatic tramp of square-toed shoes pounded by with blind, martinet precision. The roundsman on the beat was keeping up his mechanical, treadmill pace. A dark, girlish face peeped out from the hood of the cape that cloaked her lurking shape. She could easily have touched the policeman as he clumped along, doggedly unmindful of the stars above him and the pulsing human shadow at his right.

Again Jill hastened on noiselessly through the darkness.

She paused in a crooked, cobbled alley. There were shops of sorts there—of the poorer sorts—moldy book stalls, pawn shops, all the flotsam of a poverty-ridden, secondhand section.

One little shop stood out, superior to its fellows. The casement windows carried an air of charm, hard to describe in the half lights of the deserted alley. The time-dipped panes were shot into vivid tints, like the flash of crude colors flung from fresh oil on a wet pavement. They were typical of the prismatic hues of more than one fine gem that had found its secret way into a little room there.

Jill entered the side alley. It was narrow and choked with boxes. She knocked twice, then once, at the sturdy rear door. It was the signal agreed upon.

Came a pause, as if the dusky shop held its ears and listened breathlessly. Then a heavy bolt was carefully slid back. Jill's quick ears caught the faint sound. She turned the knob. As the door yawned, she stepped inside.

A screen, hinged in three sections, stood across the entrance. The screen was of dark wood, covered with heavy black material. It was like a drop curtain to con-

ceal some superior act of legerdemain or stagecraft. It offered an opaque barrier to hide any tattling leak of light.

Jill shot the bolt behind her, and stepped beyond the black screen into the subdued light of the room. For a moment she paused. Her sudden dark entrances always affected her strangely. The mystery of the place gripped her with a magic lure. It was like the forgotten scent of some old-world sunken garden, like the peaceful plash of palm-shaded fountains, like a bit of fine old brocade woven in the bold relief of life.

A little old man stood watching her with softened, speculative gaze. He was clad in a worn velvet smoking jacket, but his linen was as immaculate as one would find in some fashionable uptown resort. His feet were incased in black satin slippers, splashed with crimson embroidery like fresh goutts of blood. His large head was covered with a crimson skullcap.

He held forth both his hands with a gesture revealing both grace and charm.

"Ah, my little Jill!"

The words carried an odd foreign intonation. One sensed that he spoke many languages.

"Ah, Papa Ruys!" the girl answered, putting her arms about him, and stroking the finely lined old face. She stood back to regard him. "You look tired. There are amethyst circles under your eyes."

She flung off her cape and seated herself in a dark, carved chair. Her slender feet sank into the heavy pile of the dull-tinted oriental rug. Its subdued tones were like the mellow strains of light sifting through the windows of some dim cathedral.

Ruys van Grandin had recently come to play accessory to the skill of Jill's deft fingers. Erect, he leaned against the blotched wall of the dingy old room. He removed the scarlet skullcap and displayed a shining expanse of cranium. He mopped his head with a large square of linen.

"I've been working all night for the past week, cutting up into sufficiently unrecognizable shapes the yellow diamond which I brought with me—the last prize of the Nichinoffs. Young Rondin passed it over to me. He was frightened purple, for the police were hard upon his heels; but they lost the scent before my little shop."

"I was quite alarmed when I received your letter telling me that you were going to travel abroad—meaning, in our code,

that you were taking quarters at No. 7 Cobblestone Way. Oh, Papa Ruys, the Crystal Vampire! It's here—in this city!"

"What?" exclaimed the little old man, coming close, his voice a husky whisper.

"Selig has it. He showed it to Mme. de Villiers and Mrs. Tiverton this very morning!"

She romped into a racing recital of the visit.

Ruys van Grandin went to a cupboard in a corner. He brought out a huge meerschau pipe and an enamel tobacco jar. He crowded the bowl full, and smoked slowly while Jill hurried along.

"And I have every detail of the size and the cutting!" she ended.

Like a bronze idol burning incense, old Ruys van Grandin exhaled the fragrant tobacco as he listened with closed eyes. With a slow gesture he put down the huge meerschau.

"It is necessary," he told her in his mellow, precise way, "that we should lose no time. Come!"

From his trousers pocket he produced a bunch of small keys, one of which he applied to a slit in the mouth of a dragon on a huge carved chest that stood in the corner of the room. The cover came up. The dark chest was seemingly lined with double rows of rare, embossed books.

Van Grandin easily raised the books, which were cunningly fastened to the movable base of the chest. Narrow, curving steps disappeared down into the darkness.

By the flare of his electric torch they descended the steps. The old man extinguished the lights as they went down, and closed the chest after them. Dampness greeted Jill's nostrils—the dank, murky smell of earth. Van Grandin applied his keys to a sturdy wooden door at the foot of the steps. At the same time he pressed the switch.

This was Jill's first visit to the room in the cellar. She hesitated on the threshold. Then a little cry of delight fell from her parted lips. She clasped her hands together, with a childish gesture of pleasure.

"Oh, Papa Ruys!" she murmured. The mist of emotion blurred her gray eyes. "You've brought it back to me—my beloved Amsterdam! Here it is, in the wooden flesh, carried over the seas, into the hidden heart of the earth! It's your little workshop from Amsterdam—to the life!"

Excitedly she glanced about the room—a room which was to make and break the history of gems, under the very noses of the police!

V

It was a primitive little place, essentially an old-world spot from the dim pages of another era. It was monkishly plain, with a monastic severity that whispered of untiring skill unhindered by any desire for show. There were benches, with their tops polished smooth with the ointment of use, and with the spaces beneath them occupied by many shallow drawers. There were odd metal boxes, and in a corner stood horizontal wheels of various sizes, their edges worn smooth by the dust of diamonds anointed with the oil of the olive. There were odd instruments of knifelike cast, cleavers, and hooded, high-power bulbs, along with refractoscopes and powerful magnifying glasses. Tiny phials of rainbow colors drooped from bench racks.

Ruys van Grandin stepped to a little drawer under one of the benches. From its padded interior he delicately lifted a rhomboid, clear as the purest ice. He set the transparent crystal down upon the bench with a significant gesture.

"That's the finest piece of white sapphire I've ever seen, my little Jill," he told her. "It's flawless, and so amenable to coaxing!"

"Will it do?"

"Perfectly. There's nothing that so closely resembles the diamond as a perfectly cut and finely polished piece of white sapphire, when it has been subjected to intense heat, to draw out the last of its blue tints. With the exact measurements and the full description you've given me, I shall fashion from that flawless piece of blue-white sapphire a twin Crystal Vampire that Selig himself—*under the proper conditions and circumstances*—would not recognize. I won't risk even a fine doublet. The *cuilet*, reconstructed from slabs of diamond cemented to its glass base, is likely to show hazy under too strong a light. We must be prepared for any and all contingencies. The white sapphire will safely bridge them—given the proper circumstances and environment." He gestured about the little shop. "Night and day, I shall shape from that block of clear sapphire a stone that will be a work of art, second only to the genuine!"

"But you have none of the modern tools," she reminded him. "Yours take labor and time—"

"And the love of possessing diamonds," he finished. "Mine is the lost art of yesterday. I need none of the modern mechanical devices for the finishing of gems. Skill, to my manner of thinking, needs no artificial assistance or mechanical make-shifts. Though a man may sail the seven seas and thrice encircle the globe, what will it profit him, either to paint or to refashion the marvels he has witnessed, if he holds not a primary knowledge of the use of tools?"

The old man was lost in reverie.

"How soon," Jill's voice recalled him, "will our plan be ripe? How soon can you finish the double of the Crystal Vampire—the living, breathing double? My part needs only that."

Old Ruys considered. He consulted the wafer-thin platinum watch in his waistcoat.

"In a week," he told her. "In a week!"

He took off his shabby smoking jacket and removed his waistcoat. From a drawer he brought out heavy khaki overalls. He slipped into them—an odd, gnomelike figure with his crimson skullcap and his scarlet-splashed slippers.

Jill slipped up the stairs. She knew the old man's mood. He was enthralled with the new problem, one worthy even of the art of Ruys van Grandin and of the Crystal Vampire.

Daylight shot the netted casements into faint opal plaques. Above the shop a simple sign announced that "Jacob Vermeer—Curios" carried on a modest business within.

A week later, slightly before eleven o'clock in the morning, when the pulse of the day's business had assumed its normal beat, a correct little coupé stopped before the side entrance of Selig's exclusive establishment. Two liveried attendants sprang to the door of the little car. One turned the nickel handle, while the other assisted the occupant to alight.

A fair young girl stepped upon the pavement. Her bobbed hair was the hue of fresh-minted gold. She was signally pretty. The rare oval of her face seemed almost innocent of rouge and lip stick. Upon the left side of her chin a tiny dark brown mole intensified the purity of the skin, accenting the piquant charm of the face.

She was beautifully gowned—simply, but richly. Her golden brown morning dress and the velvet cape that hung from her shoulders whispered of much money and perfection of taste. Her golden and brown satin hat was pulled low over her bob, but not low enough to conceal the glint of her golden head. A gold-meshed veil fell from its snug brim with careless and accustomed grace. Tiny brown suede pumps flashed from her silken ankles. White gloves completed the costume.

To the man on the box she called back:

"Move just along, out of the 'no parking' area, Jerry, and wait near by. I shan't be long."

The chauffeur touched a gauntleted hand to the visor of his cap, and the shining coupé moved on.

The girl sauntered by the glinting plate glass cases with accustomed, easy nonchalance. Once she consulted her wrist watch, pushing back the long sleeve of the golden brown frock with its edging of fur. She disappeared behind a door which was marked "Private."

Jill o' Diamonds found no difficulty in gaining admission to Selig's inner sanctum. Selig himself was not there—a fact which she very well knew, and on which she had counted. The little man's keen glance might have seen through her make-up. M. Henri, his partner, was in command of the shop—and of the Crystal Vampire. Selig had left the city for twenty-four hours on urgent business.

Jill's plan was simplicity itself. As she strolled to the rear of the main show case she merely tendered the polite attendant a note written on Agatha Tiverton's familiar monogrammed stationery. She had made a tracing from the original sprawling invitation to Mme. de Villiers. She had made herself letter-perfect in the imitation of Agatha Tiverton's bold, round, childish chirography. She and old Ruys had examined the result of her patient labor under many magnifying glasses, and the jewel master had found the imitation satisfying—suspicion-proof.

To the attentive clerk she gave her forged note of introduction from Agatha Tiverton. With just the proper touch of girlish hauteur she told him:

"A note for M. Selig, if you please."

M. Henri emerged from the safelike confines of his office. He greeted her effusively. His dark eyes saw, without seeming

to note, that she was fair and beautifully gowned, this young and charming *demoiselle* whom Mrs. Tiverton had sent to look at the Crystal Vampire. Mme. de Villiers and her friend were still haggling over the price of the splendid gem, but Selig hoped that Mrs. Tiverton would ultimately buy it at his own figure. He could afford to wait.

"Ah, Mlle. Monteith," said M. Henri, "will you do me *ze honneur* to step inside my private workshop—my *atelier*, *s'il vous plait*? It will be a pleasure to grant a favor to a friend of Mme. Tiverton. Just entaire within, please!"

He held open the door of the inner office, and followed her in.

VI

WITHIN the office, a small room paneled with mahogany, the firm's strong box was sunk behind triple plates of specially tempered and tested steel. The first plate proof against a drill, the second against an acetylene torch, and the third against either weapon. In this repository it was the partners' custom to keep their rarest and most valuable gems. An automatic electric alarm connected the safe with the nearest police station. The vault was like a bank for security. Moreover, it did away with the danger of messenger service between a bank's safe-deposit vault and the shop.

A heavy door opened under the urge of M. Henri's skilled manipulating fingers. He fumbled among the steel partitions and brought out the familiar red satin case.

Upon the little glass-topped table in the office, used for private display purposes, M. Henri flung a square of crimson velvet, and on this he set the satin jewel case.

Jill o' Diamonds sat on a plain, heavy mahogany chair on one side of the tiny table. The mahogany roll-topped desk was locked down. The walls of the office were plainly paneled, and the floor was without covering. The room contained only the big locked desk in the corner, with a swivel mahogany chair before it, and the glass-topped table, with Jill and M. Henri seated opposite each other. There were no other furnishings, no loopholes, no hiding places.

Once Jill o' Diamonds seemed to gnaw nervously at her lip, but her jaws soon became quiet again.

M. Henri pushed the snap on the jewel case. The lid flew back, and the Crystal Vampire flashed once more, with all its

exotic beauty. Jill's eyes darkened with the stress of pent-up emotion.

M. Henri read the exalted look on her face.

"Ah, my dear, but you have a pretty eye for gems!"

Jill did not answer.

"Place it on the little velvet mat," she requested. "Let me see it freed from the shadow of its case."

All too gladly M. Henri complied. Not the ghost of a suspicion warned him that the Crystal Vampire was in peril of its life. How could he guess that the charming girl opposite him was the famous diamond collector whose exploits were known through the length and breadth of Europe, even though her identity had remained completely hidden?

The Crystal Vampire burst into sparks of prismatic glory. M. Henri pushed the satin case to the far edge of the glass-topped table. This was better than Jill had hoped, for she had planned to slip the case near the edge with her own hand. This was her cue, the moment for which she had planned with consummate care, as she had moved back and forth all the pawns of her cunningly devised scheme.

The girl calmly leaned forward, seemingly enthralled. Her slender hand went out to touch the stone, as if she doubted its actual reality. It was a familiar gesture with jewel zealots.

Simultaneously her left arm, covered with the velvet cape, crept along. A fold of the cape touched the satin jewel case ever so slightly, and the case fell to the polished floor.

Jill made a little move, as if to reach for the fallen case; but M. Henri courteously forestalled her—as she knew he would. He stooped and retrieved the satin box.

Jill leaned toward him, apparently watching his hand as he reached down to the floor. As they both straightened back, the Crystal Vampire flashed like a giant drop of dew on the velvet crimson mat.

With gentle fingers Jill disengaged her velvet wrap. With a graceful gesture, she dropped it down until it rested in glimmering folds on the mahogany seat of the chair. Her right hand paused among the folds for just a second longer than was necessary.

Freed of her wrap, she leaned forward. She placed her elbows on the glass-topped table, with her little chin sunk on her palms.

Slowly she bent downward toward the diamond. She put forward a slender hand and placed the gem on her palm, evidently for better examination of its beauty, enhanced by the crimson background.

This also was a movement familiar to M. Henri. Prospective clients often insisted on handling a stone for close inspection. Besides, what was there to fear in that bare, steel-backed cage of a room from the slip of a girl before him?

Suddenly a startling change came over the charming face of Jill o' Diamonds. She placed the diamond back on the velvet mat, and bent toward it. The shadow on her face deepened.

"Your microscope, M. Henri!" she requested breathlessly.

Wonderingly he brought the instrument, in its chamois case, from his inner coat pocket. He watched the girl's face with surprise. She stooped low over the stone. The baffled, puzzled frown on her forehead darkened.

Hurriedly she set the diamond on the glass table top, flinging the velvet to one side. She straightened back. Disbelief, incredulity, and fear were stamped on her face. Her breath came hurriedly.

"Oh, M. Henri, M. Henri! That—that cannot be the Crystal Vampire! It is an imitation, a fake! It is no diamond, let alone the Crystal Vampire!"

Almost rudely he snatched the magnifying glass from her fingers. He bent forward. The seconds ticked by. With shaking fingers he picked up the stone. One terrifying touch was enough, aided by the glass.

"It's—it's slightly warm," Jill gasped. "Not the right feel for a diamond!"

He nodded wordlessly. From another pocket he produced a delicate jeweler's file. Doggedly he refused to believe his own sight and touch. He must resort to mechanical means to verify his terrible, unbelievable suspicion.

He dragged the little file across an edge of the gem. Weakly, limply, he leaned back.

"*Mon Dieu*, it scratches! It's a fake—a fake! Some one has stolen the Crystal Vampire!"

In white, clenched fist he held the stone and the file, as his bewildered gaze traveled back to the strong box in the wall, which he had so recently unlocked. Tampering with it was impossible. There were six

sets of tumblers. In addition, it took two special keys from his own ring to get inside the triple sets of steel doors to the inmost compartment where the Crystal Vampire had been safeguarded. Access to such a vault was impossible. That meant—that meant—

M. Henri floundered before this accusing chasm, which widened momentarily. He knew, by his accustomed sense of sight and touch, that he had held the real Crystal Vampire in his fingers when he placed the gem on the table for the girl's inspection. Long years of expert association with diamonds had taught him, with barometric sureness, the familiar cold "feel" of a true diamond. It becomes second nature with an expert. A fake always reveals a slight feeling of warmth to the touch—unknown to the layman, but known to any adept.

"It didn't *feel* right," Jill was saying. "The moment I touched it, I thought it had the wrong temperature."

The girl spoke like a connoisseur; and yet—and yet—

In a flash, the incident of the fallen satin case returned to M. Henri's shaken, seeking mind. It had happened in the space of seconds. Could an exchange have been effected then? But who could have had such an intimate, marvelous knowledge of the weight, the size, and the cutting of the Crystal Vampire as to fashion this extraordinary duplicate, which had even fooled him for a brief time?

He straightened up. He pressed a button in the side of the desk. All the while his mind was in a turmoil to discover some possible explanation of the stone's disappearance; but his eyes never left Jill's distressed face.

She was the picture of innocence, dismay, and surprise, as she leaned back in the little mahogany chair, with the folds of her cape gripped tightly about her.

A junior partner opened the door, stepped in, and closed it. He read the perturbation in Henri's face and the forlorn, startled air of the girl.

"Desmond," rapped the jeweler, "get Miss Carmen down from the balcony. Tell her I need her here at once!"

Desmond left the room and closed the door, without comment.

"What—what can have become of it? How could it have happened?" begged Jill o' Diamonds.

A knock sounded. A young woman in

the sedate black garb affected by Selig's employees entered and closed the door.

"Miss Carmen," Henri's voice commanded crisply, "I regret the step I'm forced to take. I'll step outside and leave you with this young woman. I wish you to search her with the utmost care and thoroughness."

Dazedly Jill o' Diamonds stood up. A wave of scarlet flooded her face. It receded, to leave her very pale.

M. Henri went outside.

Some time later the matron opened the door.

"Come in," she invited in terse, businesslike tones.

"Well, well?" rasped M. Henri.

"There's not a thing on her, sir—not a thing the size of a pinhead. I can swear to it."

"You've missed nothing—not even her cape?"

"Not a thing, sir. There's nothing the size of a kernel of corn. I've been through everything three times. There's a little rip in the left sleeve hem, under the fur; but nothing suspicious—not a thing, sir."

Jill stood up pathetically. She was very pale. There was scorn in her fine eyes, and her little chin was uplifted defiantly.

"You've subjected me to a shameful indignity!" she burst out. "Quite unnecessarily, too. If I had been concealing the gem on my person, do you suppose for one instant that I'd have been foolish enough to call your attention to the stone's substitution? For it was I who first discovered the fake for you! Would a common thief have called your attention to that fact? You shall smart for this outrage!"

"I—I—" stammered M. Henri. "True, you *did* discover it!"

He leaned back helplessly against the walls, as if for support.

Like a young Diana she turned upon him. She had never looked more entrancing. Color flamed in her cheeks; but it was not the color of outraged modesty, as he erroneously concluded. It was the badge of triumph.

"If you've no further indignities to subject me to, I'll go!"

She turned from him, a slender, defiant figure, the personification of girlish dignity and pride. Quite unmolested, she threaded her way through the shop and back into the little coupé. It sped from sight.

M. Henri sagged in his chair. Perspira-

tion dotted his brow. He plucked at the satin box. Dazedly he examined the marvelous duplicate which had so successfully masqueraded in the place of the Crystal Vampire.

Then he took down the telephone receiver and rasped out a number.

VII

WITHOUT any mole on her chin, without her blonde accessories to the rôle of Lily Monteith, Jill knocked softly on old Ruys's rear door. It was midnight.

She danced into the room. Around and about she whirled. Her feet flashed and twinkled like the refracted rays from some beguiling diamond.

Breathlessly, laughingly, she sank into her chair, exhausted by her dance of triumph. With a quick gesture she held out a slender hand. On it the Crystal Vampire scintillated with all its seductive charm. The sheer beauty of the bauble brought a lump to Jill's throat. It was like the wonder and the hush of purple twilight, when a workaday world seems wrapped in the royal mantle of majesty and mystery.

Ruys van Grandin picked up the famous stone. Awe, approaching reverence, tinged his old face.

With a lilt in her voice, with happiness in her eyes for an adventure intriguingly run, Jill's vivid words raced on, like the flash of her twinkling, triumphant toes:

"When M. Henri stooped to recover the

fallen case that I had pushed to the floor, I ripped out the duplicate diamond from the hem under the fur of my left sleeve band, and placed it on the red mat. Then I palmed the real diamond, embedding it in the little wad of gum that I had just taken from the roof of my mouth. Quicker than scat, I stuck the real diamond into the gum and anchored it under the solid seat of the plain mahogany chair I was sitting upon. A wooden side strip hid the bottom of the seat from any stray glance. Besides, who would dream of turning over a plain, solid mahogany chair to search for a sizable diamond? Then, after I had convincingly simulated outraged dignity at the matron's futile search of me, I just sank limply into the folds of my cape, which lay against the chair. Screened by my cape, I removed the wad of gum and the Crystal Vampire from under the seat. Then I faded speedily from sight."

Throughout many nights the lapidary's secret room droned with the soporific whirl of wheels edged with diamond dust. Old Ruys cut and polished the erstwhile Crystal Vampire into twin siren stones of alien shape and unrecognizable style. Subsequently it would reënter the marts of men, molded into twin drops of brilliance under his canny, masterly touch.

So mysteriously disappeared from the world of diamonds that bewitching, hypnotic gem, the Crystal Vampire.

COME BACK

COME back, my leafy one, with breasts abloom,
Dogwood between thy dream-deep arms, and heavy gold
Of tresses, with scarce room
Within thy nut-shaped face for those wide eyes,
For cleft pomegranate of thy mouth scarce room!
Come back, come back, ere I grow sudden old
And drearly wise,
And fling thy beauty on me, and inclose
Me fast within the wildness of thy rose!
Hide not away—come back!
For still thine own am I, thine own;
Heap all thy blossom on me; deep in thy snows
Drifted above me, deep and deep and deep,
Shut me away from life, and lock me in
With thy tranced mouth alone,
Lost as two lost in an enchanted sleep.
Come back, my leafy one, dear soulless child,
Touched not by sorrow, and by thought of sin
Undarkened, undefiled!

Orville Bennet

The Letter Petter

THE AMATORY EXPERIENCES OF A GIRL WHO DEvised AN
ENTIRELY NEW METHOD OF LOVE-MAKING

By Mary Carolyn Davies

THE first of the social climbers was *Cinderella*. She didn't scruple to use questionable methods, at that. She crashed into a ball to which she had not been invited, and posed as something she wasn't.

Cinderella was not so different from hordes of wistful young ladies of to-day, who look over the fence into the greener yard of society, and long to climb over. Flame Forrester, without any fairy god-mother, without any help except from her own wits, climbed over, and was accepted with open arms when she got there, quite as if she had always belonged. Indeed, when she came West, to summer at the Manzanita Inn, her fellow summerers did not guess that she hadn't always belonged.

Dancing feet and a dancing heart, whimsical, elusive, audacious, uncaught, half pagan, wholly alluring — Flame Forrester was as different from the rest of the drawling débutantes in the fashionable hotel as a violet growing in wet, brown soil is different from one painted on paper.

Ferene St. Oange knew women well enough to observe this fact from the moment of his arrival; but he also knew women well enough not to show that he had made the discovery. Ferene was not unintelligent, and he could not help knowing that he was being deliberately stalked by several exclusive matrons and daughters. Some of them, possibly, had decided to spend what his brother called the hunting season in this lovely hotel on the wild Oregon coast because the newspapers had announced that Ferene intended spending a month there.

Perhaps he knew that Flame Forrester would like him better if he did not seem too quickly interested; or perhaps it was merely his whim to be aloof that month.

The St. Oange money and position were such as to make people indulgent to his whims.

"He's a haughty, aristocratic sort of beast, isn't he?" Flame Forrester languidly remarked to the girl balancing next to her on the narrow veranda railing, where they hung drying in the sun, still breathing deeply from their fight with the breakers.

Ferene was passing like a prince whose mind was on affairs of state.

"He's the catch of the season," answered the girl beside her, with a hasty dab at her wet bob, although she knew that the magnificent St. Oange would not even glance in her direction. "Imagine the clever mothers coming all the way from New York to capture him, and pretending they want to see what the Pacific is like; and the first night here his engagement to Miss Van Dusen is announced. It's a scream! They can't just go back to Lake Placid, because it would give them away. They have to stick it out!"

Ferene's *fiancée* was all that Flame wished she had not been, for she was irresistibly, unconquerably, and provokingly fascinating. Denise van Dusen was tall, dark, classic, and slow-moving, with faultless features and sonnet-worthy eyebrows, and with the perfect poise and imperious graciousness of one born to wed such a man as the St. Oange. Yes, she was the princess incarnate.

Flame Forrester hated her impersonally and cordially—Flame, who was really shy, and who knew that she was plain—for *Cinderella* had fallen in love with the prince. She had been coolly impervious to impetuous boys from her youth up, but something had happened to her with her first glance at Ferene St. Oange. Something had happened, and she had never changed since.

He had not even seen her, in the welter of other girls. He had been introduced to her in the beginning, as to all the rest; but he never spoke to her until one evening a week after the announcement party.

She was sitting alone on the railing outside a French window, escaping from a dance with a temporarily ardent suitor, who transferred his affections every few days, and whom all the girls detested. St. Oange came out to smoke a cigarette.

"Blur in the darkness, you're Miss Forrester, aren't you—the girl in the low blue car and the white sweater, daytimes?" he asked.

"Correct!" said she.

"Wallflowering?"

"Bull's-eye!" she rejoined.

"Mind if I look at your moon?"

"So long as you don't mention it."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I hate men who mention the moon."

"Quite so," said he. "We do it to please girls, you know."

"So stupid!" said she.

"The method? Or wanting to please them at all?"

"You don't have to kill yourself trying to please them," she said frostily. "How does it feel to be *Prince Charming* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and the Baron Renfrew of the Manzanita Inn?"

"Oh, come now!" he remonstrated. "You don't rally round, I notice!"

When he teased, he had a dimple.

"No," said Flame. "I don't belong. I work for a living. No one here knows anything about what I do, but it earns me leisure and grapefruit. I'm an impostor—only a poor working girl. I work right here, but no one knows."

"What is it you do?" he asked.

She looked at him reflectively, considering whether to tell him. She decided that he didn't matter, so why not?

Ferene St. Oange had all the technique of a dark, suave movie hero, but, though tall and lithe, he was blue-eyed and blond. His hair was a very soft, light brown. It was straight, and so was his gaze.

"I'm a letter petter," she said. "That's my business."

"You're a what?"

"A letter petter. I do my necking with a pen, ink, paper, and two-cent stamps. It's safer."

"You mean you write love letters to your sweetheart?"

"No—to other girls' sweethearts, to husbands who haven't yet found their wives in the tangled welter of girls, to girls whose hope-not chests have tear stains on the embroidered guest towels, to men in forest rangers' cabins and logging camps. You'll succeed as a salesman if you get something to handle that common people want. If a man is lame, you can sell him a crutch. If a man is lonely, you can sell him love. This country is full of lonely people. What the average American wants is love. I give 'em love. Hence the jade ring, the pumps, the lobster *pâté*, the car."

"You give 'em *what*?"

"I supply them with love—companionship, a pal, some one to give a darn if their head aches, or if they have a blister on the left foot just under the big toe. I pour out my heart to them, at so much a pour. I'm Cynthia Gray, Marian Miller, Beatrice Fairfax, 'Advice to the Lovelorn'—only I don't do it in columns, but personally. Oh, I'm not the first, by any means, but I'm a practical, professional, go-getter letter petter! Fifty cents a letter. I make 'em long and fat—the letters, I mean."

"What a girl!" he said. "What a girl!"

"I have carbons," she went on. "No. 1 is—"

She went on to explain her methods.

"But how did you ever think up the stunt? Fascinating way to make a living, I call it."

"I first got the idea from 'Molly Make Believe,' by Eleanor Hallowell Abbot," she replied, "and then from the love-lorn columns. Think of all the massed loneliness in a big city—all the girls who cry themselves to sleep and the men who—don't." She paused. "It's my job to make their lives a little more livable, not to say joyous. I give them a dream to chew on till they find something real to break their teeth over—and their hearts."

He was silent, and so was she.

"Besides—I chew on the dream, too."

But this she only said to herself, deep and low in her heart, for it was something she would never let any one know. In the very instant that she said it to herself she smiled at him brightly, cynically, radiantly, with the care-free grin of a child. Lonely? Let any one try to pin it on her! She was the last person in the world ever to have a lonely moment. She asked him to promise to keep her secret, and he did.

"Do you like it—your job?" he asked.

"Like it? I made it," she said proudly. "I love it. I revel in it. It thrills me anew every day. It's work, and a game, and a living, and friends, and lovers. It's everything; and there's no danger of getting my own heart hurt, as I surely would if I had real girl friends, real lovers. I'm homely, you see. I'm sensitive. My heart would surely get hurt! I'm impulsive. I'm a born petter; and petting, in these modern days, is dangerous. I don't dare let a man touch me, and yet I hunger for it; so I take it out in letters. They're right good letters. They're actual flesh and blood letters. That's why the people love them. They know they're real. People know those things. You can't fool them."

"Do they answer?"

"Oh, yes! Answering the answers is the best part of it all. Their first letters are pitiful, some of them; but how happy most of the answers are! Three people have written to tell me that my letters kept them from committing suicide. That's worth it all, even if it wasn't true, even if they didn't mean it. Don't you think so?" she asked wistfully, looking up at him.

She seemed pitiful, so little, so brave, shut out from so much, and winning it single-handed for herself.

"They meant it," he swore.

She looked up gratefully.

"I can't think where he is," came a voice at that instant from the window behind them. It was almost a fretful voice, but too well bred to be actually irritable. "Where can he have vanished to?"

"That's I," he whispered guiltily.

"The vanishing prince," she whispered back. "Un-vanish quickly!"

"But when shall I see you?"

"I'm going away to-morrow on a camping trip," she decided suddenly; "but I'll give you a chance, some time—maybe!"

She knew that safety lay in flight, so she packed the next morning, while Ferene was on his early canter with Miss Van Dusen. Miss Flame Forrester had driven away before he came back and discreetly inquired. She had gone for a camping trip for the rest of the summer—where, no one knew.

II

FLAME FORRESTER was camping in a small tent on a large lake in British Columbia. She was all alone, with only her heavy blue roadster for sentinel. It was pure

heaven—no chatter, no newspapers. She was giving herself a brief vacation from even her lovelorn job.

She had gone there to forget the only *Prince Charming* who had ever come into her life. He was going to be married to his princess late in the fall, and Flame had to forget him. It was three weeks since she and the blue roadster had slipped away. Forgetting wasn't so easy. She who had so often ministered to the sufferers of the Great Plague Love was at last a victim herself.

"He's an engaged person, and besides, I hardly know him. Of course I don't love him," she said to herself.

But she did, and the fact kept her furious at herself and him.

One day a party of tourists said a hail and farewell to her, and left her the newspaper of the Sunday before. Thus it happened that she saw the ludicrous news which should not have been wholly unexpected to any one who knew the little ways of Ferene's speedometer. St. Oange had been driving back to the East from Oregon, and a grim guardian of the law, who was determined to make an example of a rich man's son, had sent him to jail for a month.

Flame Forrester gasped.

A small dirty jail in a small dusty town of the dustiest State in the Middle West for the heir of the St. Oange fortune! How his friends would chaff him! He would think it a lark—at least just at first. Well, what was it all to her? But the look of his name in print shattered the thin-iced peace that was forming over her heart.

She broke camp and drove back to the Manzanita Inn, where she was rapturously welcomed by the waitresses and those of the guests who had been there during her former stay.

Miss Van Dusen, seeing people crowd about Flame Forrester after dinner, was pleased, in her graciously condescending manner, to welcome Flame into a beach fire party for the evening. It was there that she overheard Denise and penniless Teddy Bryde talking in the darkness behind her, while the rest sang. Flame could not help discovering that they really cared for each other, and that Denise was going to marry Ferene for the sake of safety and position and money and her mother.

Flame was shocked; but a certain gladness went over her, though she would not recognize it.

"She doesn't love him! Denise doesn't love him!" Flame thought to herself.

After all, what did that matter, she asked herself sanely, as they all walked up the beach to the hotel in the moonlight?

"They're engaged, just the same. They'll be married, just the same."

But a certain change had come into the situation. There was no longer her loyalty to another girl to hold her back. She was more free to love him now—but she didn't love him, she didn't! She was more free to think about him, anyway; but she didn't intend to think about him.

The next morning, when Flame went downstairs for her accumulated mail, she found in it a wire from St. Oange. He had addressed it to the Manzanita Inn, and had written "Please forward," but she had reached the inn before it had been sent on.

"Stone walls do not a prison make, of course," the telegram read, "but they do their little best."

"The insane man! Why, he must have spent a fortune on this wire! Can't he count ten?" raged Flame. "And he writes everything out in the longest way!"

There followed a request that she would send him a series of her letters, to pass the time. His wire ran on:

Days are long, as seen from some viewpoints. From others, I am aware, they are far too short; but where I am, they look long! A month in this place! Even you can't imagine it, though your imagination is a well trained one. So, casting about for something to amuse me, I thought of you.

How he must have smiled as he wrote that! He loved to say an audaciously rude thing to a girl; and girls swallowed it so meekly! At this last sentence all Flame's fierce hatred for him sprang up like a wind-blown flame. It demanded revenge.

"I'll amuse him!" she said fiercely. "The beast—the haughty, conceited, blue-eyed, blond beast!"

She jabbed holes in his letter with a pen.

"I'll hurt him!" she raged. "If I've learned anything about packing letters with dynamite, since I took up this job, I'll use all my skill now! Dynamite and matches—that's all I'll put in 'em! I'll show him!"

Her love for him was gone. She wanted revenge for all that he had unknowingly made her suffer, and for this insolent phrase.

"Start easy," she planned her campaign. "Spare the engine for the first five

hundred miles, and then—zip, eighty miles an hour on the curves! I'll have him hanging on to his hat with both hands!"

So she started easy—very softly and innocuously—the motherly touch, with a sardonic smile at herself and him; but through the nonsense, now and then, she couldn't help giving glimpses of her real self—whimsical, shy, star-seeking. He had asked her to remember her promise and give him a regular professional course; but she resolved not to send him the usual series of letters. No—he deserved far worse. She would brew him some special ones, extra strong.

She wrote to him every day, with occasional little jabs of notes, unexpectedly sweet, thrust in between. In the first daily letter she explained that she was going to concoct a special series for him. Then she wrote:

You're to pretend that we're sweethearts. The frantic, parted lover—that's your rôle. Here's the scenario—we are lovers who have just met, and in the very rapture of discovery we have been torn apart by cruel fate. You are held in a dungeon—has it bars, really, and rats? I've always wondered! I am sitting by the window in a lofty tower, slicking up your shield with sapolio; and all my shy, sweet thoughts of you I put into daily letters. Get me, bo? You'll receive another letter to-morrow.

He did, and he had never been so eager for his prison meals as he was to see what was in Flame's next missive. He opened it and read:

It has all been so tumultuous, so joyous and delirious and utterly, miraculously splendid, so breathless, our finding out about each other at last! Real love happens to two picked people once in centuries; and all the rest ride the highways of the world, seeking it, like the Holy Grail. What have we ever done that it should be we—just we—to whom the miracle chose to happen?

He read the rest of the letter.

"Glory! That kid can write!" he thought. "What if it were true, of some couple, somewhere?"

He felt wistful, cheated.

The next day's letter had a paragraph that wakened a twin longing:

Our goals and our dreams—do they fit? That's what matters. Some people's never could. Ours? Oh, my dear, they can! The miracle!

He wished it were true—of some one! Nay, of himself! He had never known that communion. Miss Van Dusen was a fascinating little siren. He felt her fascination to the full, and enjoyed her daily

letters, too, but—what *were* Denise's dreams and goals?

The third letter contained an arresting paragraph:

A life is such a truly important thing to give away; but here's mine. Take it! It's nothing to me, unless you can make use of it.

Somehow that wrung his heart.

A few days later, Flame touched on her memories of him:

I like most your saying "honey" in the deep voice that is so low and tender for me, and so big for other people.

"My saying 'honey' to her!" he mused. "Why, I never said it!"

How would it feel to say it? His fascinated mind could not get away from the idea. He had often said "honey" to the luring Denise, but she hadn't particularly gone into raptures about the voice in which he said it. How did Flame Forrester know what sort of voice he said it in, anyway?

"The deep voice that is so low and tender for me, and so big for other people," she wrote. The words had the ring of a real experience; but it wasn't Ferene's voice that she had heard saying "honey" to her. It must have been some one's, though—that reporting was too accurate. Whose? Whose? None of his affair, of course. What was the girl to him?

"Our goals and our dreams—do they fit? Oh, my dear, they can! The miracle!" Yes, darn it, they did; but Flame couldn't know that. All that she wrote about the woods, the sea, driving, swimming, the sunsets at that wild beach—it was all exactly what he felt. Her thoughts about life, too, were his—about love, a home, children!

Oh, could there be a girl like that? Was there actually a girl as real as that in the world? In this day of bored, blasé dolls, was there a red-blooded, pulsing girl like that left—a real woman? What a lucky chap the fellow would be who won her—the fellow whose ideals and dreams would fit with hers!

Twenty-four hours before another letter could come, unless—would she?

Yes, it came—just a note, all nonsense and laughter, but in her writing! He lifted the paper suddenly and kissed it. Then, startled, he blushed. Dutifully he lifted Miss Van Dusen's letter of the day to his lips, and gave it a longer and more courteous kiss. He wrote and asked Miss For-

rester not to write to him again—and then he tore up his letter. He was allowed to send only one letter a week, and he had alternated them. Denise and Flame Forrester sharing equally. Now he wrote to Denise, instead.

At last the weary month was up, and he drove back to Oregon, to see Denise. He owed her that, after her patient, faithful letters. He decided to pop up suddenly, without her dreaming that he was near. It would be a surprise.

It was, to him. Denise was sitting on a boulder near the starlit sea, with young Bryde. Her head was on his shoulder, her arms were around his neck, and she was sobbing that she loved him, that she had to marry Ferene because of the money, but that she would never love any one but Teddy Bryde—never!

Denise's mother had told Ferene that he would find her daughter strolling on the beach, and his first thought was that Mrs. Van Dusen would be distressed if she knew of Denise's treachery. He stole into the shadows and walked far down the sand, alone. He almost ran into a figure in a bathing suit.

"I beg your pardon!" he said.

"No!" cried the figure, stopping short.

"Yes!" cried Ferene. "It's I!"

"But the dungeon—the bars—the rats—where are they?"

"We parted," said he. "My time is up. Didn't you know?"

"Oh, is it?" said she, with apparent indifference.

Flame Forrester was glad that she could command that voice of hers so well. He was piqued.

"I thought you were to go East," she said pleasantly.

"I came out here to see Miss Van Dusen," he explained stiffly.

He saw her start. Ah, she knew! Would she tell him? She did not.

"The little thoroughbred!" he thought. "You've had your dip?" he said aloud.

"Just going to take it," she returned.

"I'm so selfish, I like *all* the ocean. In the afternoon one has to share it with so many other people."

"Don't go into the water—or the hotel, either," said Ferene. "Walk with me—but don't talk."

She shifted her towel to her other hand, and, turning, paced with him, away from the hotel, saying not a word. The sand

sucked moistly under their feet. The ocean grumbled. One star made a path to where they walked.

"I love you!" said Ferene St. Oange.

"Oh, no, no! Denise!" she cried.

"I saw Denise—with Teddy," he said. "It was like a lifebuoy to me. It freed me from prison. She'll be glad to be free, too. She'll find that love is everything—as we have found."

"We? No!" Flame stumbled.

She wanted his lips as she had never wanted anything in life before—fame, money, leisure. She wanted his lips—the relief, the peace, that their touch would bring. When it came, that rapturous pressing of his mouth against hers, she felt the thankfulness of a traveler who, when dying of thirst, finds a spring. Only to drink, to drink—that was all she wanted.

"Dear!" he said, and all the yearning and cry of his heart were in his voice.

She answered with a happy sob.

"I thought you were only playing!" he said.

"I was—but I'm not," she sobbed. Her grammar was a little spasmodic, as it often was, but he understood perfectly. She stamped her foot in the sand. "I tried to hypnotize you, and I hypnotized myself!"

She told him all about it, and he told her all about it. Suddenly it was amazingly late, and they were saying good night on the hotel veranda. Then—in a moment, it seemed—it was to-morrow morning, and they were being married by a strange clergyman in Tillamook, as they had planned just before the last kiss the night before.

Flame stumbled happily back into the hotel—alone, for they were planning to keep their secret, pack separately, and leave in the evening for a few days in the hills together, before the news got out. This meant that Ferene would have to lunch with Denise, and he and Flame decided that they would also go on an excursion to which Denise had invited them.

Halfway through luncheon Denise saw something happen to his eyes. Some one had come into the dining room from the veranda—some one who could make his eyes shine with joy and wonder and desire. Who, who? As soon as she could, unobserved, Denise stole a look. It was that little Flame Forrester.

Denise was too experienced a modern girl not to be able to fight for the man she

wanted. Besides, she was clever. Before the party she had asked to drive to the Pirates' Cave assembled, she had learned all she needed to know. There being no need for secrecy now, Flame had told her nearest girl friend about her profession, though not about her future. The girl friend, properly pumped, had told Denise's best friend.

Denise was cruel. Besides, she had several scores to pay. She had always been jealous of Flame's popularity. She waited until all the guests for the drive had arrived, except Flame.

"The cars will be here in a moment," she said to the group on the veranda, her back to the sea, which lay ashine with blue and silver.

Flame ran down the stairs, in a white sports suit with a scarlet scarf.

"Am I late?" she cried gayly.

"I'm so sorry, Miss Forrester," said Denise coldly, not troubling to lower her voice, "but I'll have to withdraw my invitation to you. We shan't have room."

Little Flame Forrester, shy and twenty-three, but with a wealth of imagination in her heart that her intimates never guessed, stood before all their eyes like a frightened child.

There was a murmur from the girls, and then Miss Van Dusen lost her temper and her head. Flame dimly heard Denise telling all about her—how she had pretended to be one of them, and had concealed her silly trade. Flame only half comprehended the rapid sentences.

"She was a nobody," she heard dimly. "She writes letters for hire."

All the humiliating details Denise drew out pitilessly, giving quotations from Flame's carbons. How silly they sounded! The girls drew away from her, toward Denise.

"It's high time we knew who she really is!" finished Denise triumphantly.

"High time!" echoed Ferene St. Oange, stepping forward and leading Flame to them by the hand. "Allow me to introduce my wife!"

There was a gasp, followed by a laughing descent of fluffy girls upon Flame Forrester St. Oange and her husband.

And Flame knew just how *Cinderella* felt in the instant when, in front of the jealous sisters and the neighbors and the courtiers, the prince slipped the glass pump on her foot and it fitted precisely!

Faithful to Thee

THE STORY OF A JUST JUDGE AND OF A WOMAN WHOSE
LOVE NOTHING IN LIFE COULD CHANGE

By Elizabeth Burgess Hughes

THERE was a little stir in the court room as the business of the day ended. The crowd of loafers at the back was dispersing leisurely, as it always did. The lawyers were gathering up their documents and exchanging low-toned confidences.

The judge alone seemed oblivious of his fellows. He was a big man, and as he came down from the bench he moved slowly, as if the physical processes of him fell in line with the mental. As he walked the length of the room, a keen observer would have told you that he thought slowly, pondered much; and that even in the face of personal catastrophe he did what he conceived to be right. Had he not, owing to his rigidity of principle, sent one of his own relatives to prison? Duty, as he saw it, spelled inevitability.

To-day he had passed sentence on Felix Albee. The two men had pitched marbles together in a common school yard, and played "Anthony over" across their schoolhouse. In spite of the curious unlikeness of their natures, they had been the best of friends. Felix was mercurial. He had the swift scattering quality of quicksilver; yet he was exceedingly lovable. An idealist, struggling in the quicksands of his own dreams, his spirit eager, triumphant, vital as a torch flaring in a night wind, revived one among the stupid and the commonplace. He was like a gay flag in a mean street, a bright flower in a cheerless room, a burst of sudden sunshine on a gray November day.

Yet this charming and brilliant Felix had one terrible weakness. He was quick-tempered, irrationally quick-tempered — there was no denying that. He had always been lacking in self-control. A month ago, in a burst of ungovernable rage, he had shot

and killed his business partner, John Tennant.

No one could explain the motive of the crime, but a number of people knew that for some time the relations between Albee and Tennant had been strained. Recently they had agreed to dissolve their partnership, but had failed to come to terms of settlement. There had been a quarrel. On the night Tennant was killed, he and Felix had been figuring together on the table in Albee's den. Tennant had been in a bad mood all day, and Felix had been drinking. The men were alone at the time of the crime.

Hearing the explosion, Janet and two of her servants ran in, to find Tennant lying crumpled in his chair, shot through the heart, while Felix, the smoking pistol still in his hand, stood over him, muttering thickly and inaudibly. Circumstantial evidence, to be sure—but obviously it was sufficient.

In his own mind Judge Lamler fought the thing bitterly, from every point of view. It eluded him, mocked him, and then convinced him. With Albee's natural tendency to fly into a rage over trifles, and with the whisky he had drunk, some mean remark of Tennant's had set a devil loose in him. He was guilty, without a doubt. There was nothing to do but to sentence him to the chair.

The judge made his way out, passing among the stragglers who remained in the court room. As he walked, his brows came together sharply with the intensity of his thought. His face was haggard from the day's strain.

Janet had gone an hour ago. He could still see her as she had sat there in the fading afternoon light, with her head lifted, her lips apart, her eyes as tense as some

trapped animal's. He kept recalling that it was in such a dim, stained-window light that he had first seen her. She was mounting the stairs of a working girls' home, into which sanctuary he had penetrated in connection with a matter of business. Just for a fleeting instant he had met her glance. Her eyes were smiling to themselves—because for her the zest of life was so new. He had loved her at once. The quality that drew him to Janet was far deeper than mere beauty. She was an intensely feminine woman, capable of giving and receiving happiness to a transcendent degree.

It was through no lagging of the judge's that a young *Lochinvar*, in the shape of Felix Albee, won where he failed. He was slow, deliberate, silent, where Felix was gleaming, volatile, irresistible. There was something strangely dramatic in the fact that to-day he had sentenced Albee to death—had sentenced Janet, too—and had seen that most fearsome sight, a woman, alive and strong, sitting up and dying without even a whimper of sound.

II

THE judge's step faltered a little at the outer door, where the rush of the November air struck him. He felt weak and sick. Reaction was setting in. His face fell into heavy lines as he walked from the courthouse down into the street. Now and then some one accosted him, but he did not answer. The clouds closing about him shut out even friendly faces.

In his great, lonely house the silence was terrible. His servants seemed to tiptoe on padded feet. It was like the stillness of death.

He sat down before the fire, and pondered. Duty was a hard word. Had he done right to keep the faith?

The fire flickered, lessened, fell to a quiet vermilion mass that looked like strange exotic roses carved futuristically in molten metal. Sore-hearted, restless, eager to cut this knot of fate at its source, he suddenly resolved to go to see Janet. She would know nothing more than he knew, but she was Felix's wife. The judge felt that she would understand.

The resolve held, even through a certain wavering; but out in the cold, white-lighted street, with its stars and its November wind, reaction so violent that it brought nausea swept over him. Who was he that he should intrude upon this woman's grief?

He was merely the instrument which had given it its final despair; and yet—

Janet was in, of course. She was crouching over dying, faintly red coals which somehow looked colder, less fantastic, than those on his own hearth. She was a frail-looking woman, almost to delicacy, with the startled, wide open eyes of the visionary who is forever being astonished and flayed by life. Her hair, heavy and dark, hung drearily about her staring, still face. She scarcely stirred when she saw the judge—only waited breathlessly for him to speak.

"I shouldn't have come, Janet," he began awkwardly. "I feel that, now that there's no help possible. I'm in the grip of reaction, of course. I dreaded to be alone. I wanted to talk to some one to whom this thing meant as much as it does to me. You'll try to understand, won't you?"

Janet did not answer at once. When she did, her tone held a slow, husky contempt that had probably been gathering since the sentence.

"As much as it means to *you*—you who called yourself Felix's friend! Oh, don't talk! I can't bear platitudes. It means nothing to you. I am Felix's wife!"

Exactly the judge's own thought of a moment ago!

"You believe, then, that I am influenced by that old grudge? Have the years taught me nothing? Am I less of a man than I was at thirty? Won't you give a man credit, my dear, for following the path of duty when it lies straight and clear before him? You know, don't you, that Felix is guilty?"

The question was out—the ghastly thing that festered in the back of his mind. He waited, scarcely breathing; but Janet met him with a cool directness. He had thought that she would cry out or burst into tears.

"Yes, he killed Tennant—I know that; but that isn't the real question to me. Do you think it makes any real difference? I listened to all the evidence, and I loved him more every minute! In all my life I never loved him as I did when the net came together around him. Why, I didn't know it was in me to love like that! He never *needed* me so much before! In his weakness and shame he is doubly dear! Yes, he is guilty, but I love him—I love him as much as if he were innocent. I couldn't desert him now, any more than if he were my child. I shall follow him to—to the chair!"

The judge sat silent, as the bruised passion of her voice ran through the room. All the conventional things he might have said were abashed, futile, before the simple sureness of this woman's devotion to her mate. He hadn't been certain, in his strangely empty days, that such love could be. The pity, the horror, of choking off the bright, volatile life that was the fire-light on the hearth of this woman's soul, because of one mad moment of sheer temper! Why did women love so deeply? Would Janet have loved him so, had Albee never appeared?

Somehow he had thought of love as a plant that must always be nourished in fresh air and immaculate soil—a plant to wither at the first sharp breath of distrust or unfaith.

"If only there were some loophole of evidence!" he found himself saying bitterly.

Janet shook her head.

"I've gone over everything that had any bearing on the case. Tennant had almost no enemies. He was rather charming, you know. I never knew him even to be harsh with anybody, except—yes, I remember now! He had a housekeeper—a black-haired girl, rather a repellent sort of person—who once said to me that Mr. Tennant couldn't be pleased. I wondered at that, for he seemed to be the easiest person in the world to get on with."

The judge sat up, suddenly alert.

"Where is this black-haired girl?"

"Oh, I have no idea. I remember her name, though, because it was odd—Bramble Tyne. She used to work for the Marchands, too. You know them. They might tell you something of her."

"I'll ask them. Was there any other servant who might have known him well—I mean one who had left his employ?"

"I don't remember, unless—well, I believe Peter Fallow was with him once. I recall, now that I think of it, that Tennant ran across him here one day and seemed surprised that we had employed him. He didn't say anything, but I gathered that he might have discharged the man. I hadn't thought of it since."

"Janet," said the judge, "you should have told me this before. It might have made all the difference in the world. Fallow was your butler at the time when the crime was committed."

But Janet Albee moved her head again, hopelessly.

"You're wrong there. I had known Fallow a long time, and he wouldn't have hurt a worm. Certainly a trivial grudge, if he had borne it, wouldn't have swept him into murder. Anyway, as I've told you, he was out of the house at the time of the—that night. I'm quite sure about that. His mother was dying, and Fallow didn't leave her bedside till morning; so you see that he couldn't have—"

"Nevertheless," began the judge, and halted. "Where is he now—not back here?"

"Not yet. He's in the hospital—St. Anne's. He met with some sort of accident the day after his mother's death. A car skidded on a wet pavement and struck him, I think."

"What's his home address?"

"No. 40, Falcon Court. But what is all this for, Robert? You know there's no hope there. You're sure that Felix killed his friend. You know Felix's ungovernable temper. He was born with it. Why, his old nurse told me that he had his whole household intimidated when he wasn't more than seven years old. To be sure, he fought it as a man fights a dragon that threatens to devour him; but every now and then it got the best of him. He says, of course, that he doesn't know whether he killed Tennant or not, because he was drunk at the time; but you know, and I know—" She broke off with a weary gesture. "It isn't the real Felix—it's this monster that has him in its grip. I'm not going to pretend anything. I only know that I love him, and I wish that somehow you could have saved him. Drinking, high-tempered—oh, don't you see, he wasn't himself when he did it?"

The judge got up.

"I'm going now, Janet. Of all the people in the world, you and I feel this thing most. Possibly we can help each other."

"You!" said Janet, and laughed.

It was a simple thing, that word, but it stung Judge Lamler like a lash. He turned away, humiliated. Janet did not lift her head to see him go.

III

THE judge stopped at a drug store booth to call up the Marchands. No, he was informed—Bramble Tyne was not in their employ. They didn't know where she was; but wait—they had a maid who was a friend of hers. Perhaps Sarah knew.

Sarah came, and gave the address at once—No. 16, Falcon Court. She added that she hadn't seen Bramble for months, but the girl was living there the last time she called. She seemed curious, and the judge rang off hastily.

So both Peter Fallow and Bramble Tyne lived in Falcon Court! Well, that wasn't surprising, since it was admittedly a home of the just-below-the-middle class. Although he was almost too tired to think or reason, the judge felt that he must see Bramble Tyne that night. In the subdued light of the drug store he seemed to see Janet huddled over a few dying coals.

Falcon Court was a heterogeneous collection of men, women, children, mud, and tin cans. Judge Lamler picked his way cautiously along its damp alleys. No. 16, he found, was a tolerably decent house set a little way back from the street. It had evidently been pretentious once, but the residential section had long since moved uptown, and the court was dirty, swarming, odorous.

A blowzy woman admitted him, showed him the staircase in the rear, and explained that Miss Tyne was on the top floor. He made his way up the dim stairs with a queer feeling of entering on an adventure.

Miss Tyne herself opened the door. He knew her at once, this black-haired, brooding, sullen woman to whom Janet Albee had referred as rather repellent.

Janet, sweet, frank, and quick of comprehension, with a most unusual sense of humor, could never have found this woman congenial from any point of view. There are people who convince us of the aura theory. Miss Tyne's aura must have been a violent purple. She was bruised-looking, bitter, belligerent, and she had evidently been crying. Her face was streaked with faint, bloated red. She was thin and starved-looking; yet she had a certain chaotic dignity.

Her hair was tousled. She wore a shabby, soiled kimono that had once been cleanly, rosily pink. The hand that clutched it nervously together at the throat was rough and badly shaped; but her dark eyes held the judge magnetically as he advanced into the room.

Here, though the place was scrupulously clean, he was conscious of that same atmosphere of unrest. The window shade was up, and the wind-blown November night looked in. The moon swung lazily in

a huddle of taupe-colored clouds. On a chair by the window, under an inadequate light, lay a pile of sewing.

"I am Robert Lamler. You will pardon my coming here without warning, won't you? I must talk with you about the Tennant murder. I found out to-day, by accident, that you might possibly be able to throw some light on the affair."

The woman retreated, her hand working spasmodically among the pink folds at her neck. Her sullen eyes had met his in a swift, startled flash, and then turned lifelessly away.

"I know nothing about it," she said defiantly.

"May I sit down?" asked the judge.

Ungraciously she placed a chair for him.

"What do you expect to find out from me? All I know is he's dead."

Her voice wasn't pleasant—harsh, rapid, somewhat guttural. The judge looked at her.

"You were employed at one time in Mr. Tennant's house?"

"I was his housekeeper, as my mother was before me. She'd worked for his father. You see, I'd known him an awfully long time."

"For just how long?"

"Why, ever since I was a little girl. I used to run errands for his mother." She looked down nervously, pleating the folds of her kimono. "He was—older 'n me, by about ten years."

"I see!" The judge leaned back, absently noting the view from the window, as the moon rode out, high and unshrouded. "You are a seamstress?" he asked, indicating with his eyes the sewing heaped on a chair.

"Yes, sir. I've been sewing ever since I left Mr. Tennant's house; but sewing is nervous work, and I ain't got no health now. Sometimes I think I'll go back to housemaiding."

"You were his housekeeper for how long?"

"Only for six months. He—got an older woman. I guess maybe I wasn't as responsible as mother. She was there till she died, you see."

"You didn't want to leave him?"

"Why—"

Suddenly the judge shot forward on the edge of his chair.

"Don't hedge! You were in love with John Tennant!"

The color drained slowly from the woman's face, while her frightened eyes clung to his.

"Don't lie! You loved him!"

"What do you mean by love? Everybody loved him. He was always good to me, except—you see, I'd known him so long—"

"Yes, I know that. He was good to you except—go on. Tell me the whole truth. I mean you no harm, but you must tell me everything."

"I won't—I won't! It's none of your business! I—"

"Then I can make you tell; but I'd rather not do that. I've come here quietly, you see, and nobody knows it; but if I have you brought into court—"

"No! No! Oh, please!"

"You say there were times when he wasn't good to you. What times?"

The judge was sharp now, relentless, as if she were a prisoner at the bar whom he was catechizing. She shivered and hunched into her chair.

"You—you think I killed him? God being my witness, I didn't; but sometimes I wish I had. If you want to swing me for that, go ahead! I've nothing to live for, anyway. Judge, I've seen only a few happy moments since I was sixteen. Those was the times when *he* was kind—when he seemed to know I was on the earth. He made me love him, but I was no more to him than the dust under his feet. God, how I worshipped him! Once in so often he'd throw me a kind word, as if I was a dog he was pitching a bone to; and I'd walk on air for days afterward. You never heard of a woman's being such a fool, did you?"

The judge had a vision of a lovely woman in black in a deathly still court room.

"Yes; I think perhaps I have."

"Well, then, maybe you know how I felt. I'll never love anybody else! He was the whole world to me. He—he sent me out of his house when I needed him most, but I loved him just the same. I didn't want to hurt him, so I never named him—and my baby died as soon as it was born. He used to say that women who loved too much got on a man's nerves. I was afraid even to look at him, sometimes, for fear of making him sore. I never was afraid of anybody but him in my whole life, but I'd have died before I'd give him trouble. A woman that causes trouble for

a man she pretends to love doesn't really love him—she loves just herself. Oh, my God, to think he's *dead*! I can't make myself believe it. Oh, I've no right to grieve this way, but I can't help it. I loved him so, judge—God knows I loved him!"

The sudden wild weeping that Judge Lamler feared did not come; but he saw that she was quivering terribly, and he felt an involuntary contraction of the heart.

"I've told you all I know, God helping me! I had nothing to do with his death. Strange that Mr. Albee—they were such friends—"

Her voice faltered and died.

"Did you ever hear of Peter Fallow?" Judge Lamler asked abruptly.

"Oh, yes." She looked surprised. "He used to work for Mr. Tennant. They got on very well together till Mr. Tennant got it in his head that Fallow wasn't honest. He was, though—it was just a queer notion of Mr. Tennant's."

"Where's Fallow now?"

"I don't know, sir. I don't go out much, and I've sort of lost track of the people I used to know."

"Fallow was rather devoted to you, wasn't he?"

She looked at him humbly.

"I think he was, judge; but, you see, I never knew there was but one man living."

He held out his hand.

"Thank you, Bramble Tyne! Let go your misty shadow of a dream, and begin to live! No man is worth such loneliness as yours. Good night!"

Later, sitting over his fire, he wondered if he had been sentimental. He loathed sentimentality.

He sat long, thinking. He felt that he had in his hand the end of the rope that must be unraveled. It was too late to see Fallow that night, but he gently pulled at the tangled skeins. Mentally he unraveled them, and threw them clean, unknotted.

Janet—Janet would live, if he was right. Without her mate she would be dead, even though her body lived.

He was no longer in love with Janet. Life had healed that wound—aided by the charming woman whom he had later met and married. His wife had made him very happy until her death, a year ago. His present feeling for Felix's wife was one of intense friendship. He admired her, and would have done anything possible to further her happiness; but it was most of all

of Felix that he thought to-night—Felix, who was so gay and so ill fated, and whom he had just condemned to death.

IV

EARLY next morning the judge was out in search of Peter Fallow. Instead of going to the hospital, however, he went first to Fallow's home.

Peter's sister received him—a thin, spinster woman with glasses. She explained that her brother was at home on the night of the tragedy. Their mother was very ill, and she and Peter had watched by her bed all night. No, Peter wasn't out of the room at all, except for half an hour, when he had been dozing on a cot in the adjoining room. She had covered him up well, and had looked in every few minutes, to see if he slept. He was worn out with the strain, of course. When he woke, he again took his place at the bedside. Their mother had passed away the next day.

"Won't you come in, judge? There's a good fire in the settin' room."

He thanked her, and went in. It was evident that she had no inkling of his purpose.

"This is the room where your mother died?" he asked.

"No—the one in there, with the windows. Still lookin' up witnesses for the trial? I haven't seen the papers for a day or two."

He nodded absently, his keen eye covering the adjoining room. Opening out of it was a smaller one. That must be the place where Fallow had slept. The judge could see the cot just under a window. The cot was in full view of the bed, where the sick woman had probably lain. Fallow couldn't have got out of that room without being observed. There was no outer door in it. Still—

He talked casually with Miss Fallow for about twenty minutes, and left without having roused in her the least suspicion of the real purpose of his call. She thought he wanted Peter for a witness.

He went straight from her to St. Anne's. Here he found that Fallow was still seriously ill, but that he might be seen for a few minutes. Lamler usually had his way without too much argument, and the nurse left him in the sick man's narrow white room.

The judge stood by the bed, observing the patient. Fallow looked broken and

worn, and his skin was yellow. A bandage was tied across one eye. The other stared up at the visitor stupidly.

This wasn't the first time Lamler had had to battle with his own sympathies. The stark cruelty of the thing he had to do hurt him, but the pain was lost in the immensity of his desire for justice.

"Fallow," he said, sitting down, "I wouldn't be here if the matter wasn't one of life and death. Yesterday I sentenced Felix Albee to death. I thought he was guilty. Now I believe that it was *you* who shot John Tennant. Wait"—the sick man had uttered a strange sound, like a smothered scream—"until I tell you why I believe it. It is strange that no hint of the truth came out during the trial. It couldn't be credited, if one didn't know; but a chance remark of Mrs. Albee's set me on the right trail. Of course, you're ill and suffering—but I can't let Albee die like a rat in a trap. I'm your friend, Peter, but I've got to have the facts."

Fallow said nothing. He seemed scarcely to breathe. He lay there, grayish yellow, listening.

"You had a grudge against Tennant," the judge went on. "A woman whom you loved became infatuated with the man, didn't she? You knew that no good could come of his attentions to her. Your grievance smoldered in your brain till it became a consuming fire. You hated him. You were his servant, and you didn't want to commit a crime; but Tennant, who had probably observed with amusement and a little resentment your affection for Bramble Tyne, dismissed you from his employ with an unjust accusation. He said you were a thief. You weren't, and the thing hurt."

"Then you went to work for Mr. Albee. You saw Tennant frequently, and every time you hated him more. I don't know just what happened on the night of the murder. Tennant was at dinner with the Albees, and after dinner you served them with liqueurs in the den, didn't you? Then you left the house early, because your mother was dying, and you had received permission to stay with her till the end. The two men must have been quarreling before you went away. Tennant had said or done something that fanned your hatred to fury. You wanted revenge."

"Later, when you went to lie down for a moment's rest, you couldn't sleep. Your rage cried for satisfaction. While the doc-

tor and your sister were busy at your mother's bedside, you slipped from your cot, tossed up the bedclothes to look as if you still lay there, and dropped to the ground from the window beside the cot."

The judge spoke slowly, as if thinking out every step of the way.

"It was only a few blocks to Mr. Albee's house. When you reached it, you saw through the window that the two men were still there. They had had too much to drink, and were quarreling. You got into the house somehow—perhaps you have a key—and secured Albee's revolver, which he usually kept in a desk in the back hall. Behind the portières, still as death, you waited your chance. The house was quiet. Mrs. Albee and a servant or two were upstairs. Tennant lolled in his chair, with his back to the door. At the right moment you fired—straight through the man's body. A swift, sharp report—then the pistol dropped in front of Albee on the table—the hall light switched off—and you were gone. Nobody had seen you come or go. Of course, with such a terrible sight before him, Albee came to his feet, saw the smoking weapon on the table, and picked it up, swaying drunkenly and muttering maudlin questions. Tennant was dead. Thus they found the two men. Albee was charged with murder. He has been convicted, and is to die."

Sharp emphasis on that last word. The judge looked into the ghastly white face of the invalid—looked fixedly, as if his eyes would tear out the secret of the other man, no matter how deep it was.

Fallow thrust up his bandage. The agony in the man's eyes shocked Lamler out of speech.

"Oh, my God! Judge—"

"I'm no *Sherlock Holmes*, but last night I pieced the thing together, bit by bit, in my own mind. Are you going to let an innocent man go to the chair?"

"No! No!" The words came violently, rasped and husky. "I couldn't! I'd never have let him die! I'd have told the truth before *that* happened! God in heaven, but I'm glad the truth's out! I've suffered hell. I—I kept thinking they'd acquit him—a rich man like that, with so many friends. How did you think it all out so well, judge? It was all just as you say, except that the doctor nodded by the bed that night, and never knew he'd been asleep. It was easy enough getting back

through the open window to my cot. I—I didn't mean to fasten the murder on Mr. Albee. In my excitement I threw the gun on the floor—not on the table—and he picked it up. I don't know what got into me that night. I was crazy, I guess; but Mr. Tennant was insulting. He laughed when I went in, and said to Mr. Albee that he'd better watch the silver while I was around. When I couldn't conceal how angry I was, he taunted me, called me a bad name, and dashed his wine in my face. Of course he was drinking, but—honest, judge, I couldn't stand any more! A devil was turned loose in me. The next day I got hurt, and I've been lying here since, fighting myself. I didn't know they'd sentenced Mr. Albee. I thought—you—would acquit him."

Judge Lamler took out half a dozen closely written sheets from his pocket.

"I've written it all down, subject to change. I want you to sign it."

The nurse looked in for a moment, as if in warning, and then went away. Peter Fallow groaned and moved desperately on his pillows.

"All right, judge—only you've got to know why I did it. It was Miss Tyne. I loved her—loved her as a man never loves but one woman; and she was crazy about Tennant, who was a brute to her. She'd have loved me if he had let her alone. The poor little thing!"

The judge propped him up for his signature, and handed him his own fountain pen.

"Get well quickly, Peter!" he advised, with a little thrill in his voice. "The unwritten law, in many variations, still holds. There may be happiness just around the corner!"

He was not surprised when Fallow fainted.

V

THE judge let himself in at Janet's door. The light fell mysteriously through a little stained glass window on the landing. It threw vague, remembered shadows on the warm, bright walls.

In the library a low fire burned, with a table drawn up before it. Janet had been writing there. The big, bold letters flashed up at him. He could have sworn that he did not read them consciously:

Death is such a little thing, beloved! It can no more separate two souls who love each other than can the walls of a room. When I go out of your

room into mine, I'm out of your sight, but still close to you. So it is, I am sure, with death. It can never part you and me. Love like mine—this big passion that guards you as *Brünnhilde* was guarded by the sacred fire—love that could never let shame or coldness or guilt freeze it out of the heart—that would spring at the throat of one who criticized it—the tiger instinct to protect its mate—the spark God gave the human soul—

There the judge averted his eyes. Those throbbing pages belonged to Felix, as Janet, soul and body, belonged to him—as she would belong to him forever, in this world and perhaps in the next—for always. That was it—always! In the light of a love like this, life took on a new significance. He thought of Bramble Tyne and her doglike devotion to a man to whom she was less than the dust. Ah, the love of women—the love of women!

The raw, wet November day pressed against the big, staring windows. The room was very still, except for the hissing coals. He sat waiting till Janet parted the curtains and looked down at him, her face like a ghost's in the cloudy light.

He had been thinking of many things—of the stairs of the Working Girls' Home, of a certain jonquil-starred spring before Felix Albee came, of the lovely woman he had married in later years, of the buzzing court room, of Janet's black-gowned figure, of her face as they pronounced sentence—

"Janet, it's all right! I bring tidings of great joy!" he stammered, like a boy, thrusting Fallow's confession upon her.

If he had been haunted by the spectacle of a woman, alive and strong, sitting up and dying without a whimper of sound, he now witnessed the resurrection of a soul. Before it he waited, blinded yet calm, still amazed at the tenacity of this woman's love for a man who, as the judge knew in his heart, was not altogether worthy of her. He tried to speak, to tell her exactly how this miracle of freedom had come to Felix; but her lips were on his hand, her choking sobs were in his ear. Her gratitude was like the breaking of a great dam.

Then, abruptly, she was stumbling past him, snatching at a dark cloak as she went.

"Where are you going, Janet?"

She turned her glorified face to him. She laughed out. Her laugh was like a silver bell.

"I am going to *him*! My whole life has been going to him, from the very first. I tell you I love him, love him, love him, living or dead, guilty or innocent! He's *mine*! There never was any one but Felix. There couldn't be. Other women may love many men, but I could love only him. I'm his mother and his sister and his brethren. Oh, you don't understand?"

She threw out her arms in a quick, wild gesture.

"You don't really know how a woman can love—ever deeper, deeper, deeper, till her soul is actually part of another's. I loved Felix when I believed him guilty. I love him now that I know him to be innocent. Nothing can ever make any real difference. God's law of love stands far above any laws man can make. Neither death nor life can ever take Felix from me. He's my heart, my love, my little child! Oh, he's going to live! Felix! Felix!"

She poised for an instant on the threshold, glowing, palpitating, radiant as a star.

"Sometimes, Robert, he's a big man, fine and self-sufficient. Sometimes he's a bully, and I'm afraid of him. Sometimes he's a lover, and sometimes an utter stranger. There are times when he's just a little fretting baby that I must soothe and sing lullabies to; but whatever he is, he is the man I love and shall love always—always!"

She was gone, running through the rain, throbbing, electrified, toward the man whose life meant her life.

The judge bowed his head, as if in the presence of something more than finite. He wondered if Isabel had loved him like that. Love that followed to the world's end, and beyond!

Suddenly he looked very white and tired. Wheels of light seemed to coruscate against his tight lids.

Outside, the November rain pelted monotonously on the windows.

THE ONE THOUGHT

I HAVE not read in a book for many days—
I have been thinking of you and all your ways;
Your eyes and your lips I have thought of all day long,
And I have cared nothing at all for right or wrong.

Carlo Giordano

Impermanent Waves

BEING AN AUTHENTIC RECORD OF THE EVENTFUL CRUISE OF
THE YACHT GRAYLING ON LONG ISLAND SOUND

By James Kevin McGuinness

BEE—that's my wife—her name is Beatrice—broached the subject in her forthright way.

"It must be lovely in Europe this summer," she remarked, much too casually.

"Oh, you can't tell. Maybe it's raining there," I suggested defensively.

"The trip across would be beautiful," she sighed. "Imagine the moonlight on the sea!"

"I read to-day that they're putting another ferry on at Greenwich," was my amiable retort.

"It would do you good, too."

"What would?" I demanded, instantly suspicious, for I had been done good before.

"Getting outdoors," Bee informed me. "You need a vacation. A week's cruise would be just the thing to set you up."

"You know I loathe and despise water!" My wife smiled sweetly.

"I smelled your breath when you first came in, dear," she purred.

This led pleasantly up to what really was on Bee's mind.

"Stella and George want us as their guests," my wife informed me. "A friend of George's is letting him have his yacht for the rest of the summer."

"Where did it sink?"

"You needn't be so smart just because it's George!" Bee observed acidly. "It's a perfectly good yacht, and it was very nice of Stella to ask us."

"I suppose, if this don't hook George for her, we'll be their guests on a tour to the North Pole," I commented. Bee's cousin, Stella Martin, was not among my favorite in-laws. "Did she fix it to have a minister come aboard at once, in case the poor egg surrenders?"

"George Raytor is not a poor egg. He has scads of money," said Bee placidly.

"We sail on Monday from the Larchmont Yacht Club."

Up to this point I had remained on the defensive, purely as a matter of habit. Now that I realized the thing was serious, I launched a counter-attack, summoning every forceful argument I could.

"Can't possibly get away Monday," I demurred earnestly. "Got too many things to do. No chance of my cleaning up everything by then. I haven't even closed for the Phillips house yet. Looks like a good buy, too. I'm sure to find a sucker who wants a home on the water. No, I can't make it—absolutely impossible!"

This settled matters. We sailed on Monday.

The only concession I got was that the cruise would end on Saturday morning, instead of Sunday morning, as originally planned. I hooked Bill Phillips for a week's option on his place, which expired at noon on Saturday, figuring I could take it up before the banks closed.

Because she was to be aboard this yacht such a short time, Bee brought only four suit cases filled with clothes. Stella brought five; but then we had only four.

"What are all the duds for?" I inquired.

"Well, you can't tell who might come aboard," my wife condescended.

"I can tell who won't come aboard!" quoth I. "The Prince of Wales was on Long Island last summer. You girls must have got your dates mixed when you were packing."

"To hear you talk, any one would think I had something to wear!"

"They would, unless they saw you what you call dressed," said I.

In this friendly fashion we got to the landing. The skipper of the club launch had to make two trips, one with us and

one with the few clothes the girls had brought.

Grayling—that was the name of the yacht—would have made a lovely ornament for some one's mantelpiece, if it had been a few feet bigger. George was already aboard.

"Where's the oarlocks?" I asked, when I finally found places for the nine suit cases.

"Har, har!" laughed George. "Jolly good, what? The oarlocks—on a yacht! Oh, I say."

"If your tailor don't stop showing you those English styles, it 'll ruin you," I told him.

Then I sat back to watch the thing go; but it seems it isn't done that way.

George hadn't brought any crew along.

"It 'll be more sporting to do the thing ourselves," he explained.

Maybe that was the real reason; but, as it was, the four of us were so crowded that you couldn't roll up your sleeves unless every one else went below deck to give you room.

Naturally, George couldn't do much about hauling in the anchor, or making sail, or anything like that. His sure hand was needed at the wheel. Even if it hadn't been needed, it would have been there, anyway. You wouldn't expect a poor little six-foot boy, weighing one hundred and eighty in his socks, to mess around with the heavy chores. If you did expect it, what a surprise you'd get!

After I broke the anchor and my back, and pulled more ropes than all the stage hands on Broadway, and dodged booms that swung at me like Babe Ruth's bat, Grayling came to life. Away we went, making all of two knots an hour.

"My dear, you look much better already," chirped Bee.

"I shouldn't have taken out all that insurance," I groaned. "It's too much of a temptation for you!"

"Har, har!" laughed George.

Then the girls went below decks, to see about getting some lunch.

It developed in a short time that everything needed was on board, except a carving knife; so, since we were going to have dainty sandwiches by way of midday refreshment, I was called on to whittle the corned beef. The slices of bread that Bee chiseled off the loaf would have served ver- well for headstones.

"If we're attacked by sharks, we can just throw 'em one of these sandwiches, and they'll choke to death," I mumbled, but it didn't go so good; and neither did the sandwiches.

During the afternoon our speed slackened to about one knot an hour, giving the yacht the better of a liberal estimate.

"Can't we start the motor or something?" I asked George.

"The auxiliary doesn't work very well," he answered.

"What do you mean, not very well?"

"It doesn't work at all."

"I'm glad it's nothing serious," said I.

"How long do you figure it will take us to get to where we're going?"

"There's no wind to speak of," George informed me. "Unless it freshens a bit, we'll be lucky to make Manhasset Bay before nightfall."

"That means dinner aboard?"

"I suppose so."

"Well," I said, "I can stand losing about ten pounds, but after that I'm going ashore for a meal, if I have to swim!"

II

I ALWAYS used to wonder where apartment house builders got the first idea for kitchenettes, but I don't any more. I saw the place where they cooked on this Grayling, which was called a galley—in honor of the slaves, I suppose. An oil stove with two burners stood on one side. The ceiling was just high enough to let one of Singer's Midgets pass through without bumping his head more than twice.

Stella had laid in the stock of food for the cruise, with the idea of impressing George.

The girls called on me for help before they got fairly started on dinner.

"You get the beans ready, won't you, dear?" Bee requested.

"Sure thing!" I agreed heartily.

"Where's the can opener?"

But they weren't that kind of beans. They were fresh string beans, and it took me an hour to manicure them.

Meanwhile Stella requested information as to how beets should be prepared for cooking.

"You're not going to have fresh beets, too?" I asked, dazedly.

"Certainly," Stella answered indignantly. "George loves beets."

"They ought to go good with his

Thanksgiving turkey, if you get 'em cooked by then," I countered.

"Mind your own business!" my wife commanded sharply, but the beets went back into the icebox.

Stella had arranged a menu which included a steak, French fried potatoes, and sundry other friends of an able-bodied man; but when the girls got busy on the oil stove, they found it gave off enough heat to melt a pan of butter in an eight-hour day.

We dined that evening on half cooked string beans, cold corned beef, and a loaf of bread divided roughly into quarters—very roughly.

"Now I know how the Armenians feel," I commented after we had munched the repast.

Nobody helped by asking me how the Armenians felt.

It was ten o'clock when we got into Manhasset Bay, and it took us nearly an hour more to persuade Grayling to move around to where she should be. Then we dropped anchor. That didn't involve so much work for me as hoisting it did, but it was enough.

George dragged out a mandolin from somewhere and proceeded to strum it. Thitherto the worst I had known about him was that he used some sort of slickum on his hair.

"Oh, do sing, Georgie!" Stella pleaded.

"Yes, do!" Bee chimed in.

So George yielded to what might be called urging, if you didn't count my vote, and gave us a sugary ditty about pale hands that he loved.

"If you want 'em to stay pale, you'd better not take 'em yachting any more," I advised when he finished.

"Come on up to the bow, dear," said Bee. "The view is gorgeous there."

This meant that I was to quit acting like an alarm clock around love's young dream.

When it came time for slumber, I found I had been allotted the entire forecabin, all to myself. The girls had the cabin, and George picked himself the berth amidship.

After looking at my quarters I decided I'd better sleep on deck. I never could make a comfortable bed in anything smaller than a Gladstone bag.

The night was lovely. The moon's silver lantern shimmered on the calm waters, and nothing broke the stillness except a couple of hundred phonographs on sur-

rounding boats and frequent splashes as empty bottles went overboard. Before long, however, swarms of seagoing mosquitoes put off from shore and settled on me, stabbing my body so busily that when finally I succumbed to sleep, I dreamed I was being tattooed.

III

THE next day proved to be uneventful. Somebody had shut off the breeze, so we couldn't go anywhere. This was all right with me, because we were able to signal for the launch and be taken to the club for meals. I was in favor of staying out the week right where we were, but Bee vetoed the idea.

"Haven't you any romance?" my wife demanded.

"Not when I get the job of washing dishes in cold salt water," I informed her.

Stella cut in here.

"It's just for a little while," she said.

"I was in the Argonne for two days," I told her.

That evening the mosquitoes came out and finished the full-rigged ship they had started tattooing on my chest the night before.

On Wednesday afternoon we had plenty of wind, so we put out to sea and bowled along the Sound for nearly three hours, flitting hither and yon. George got real chummy with me, and showed me how to steer the ship. I wondered why, until after a while he said something about the olive he ate last week, and a headache, and maybe he'd better go below and rest a bit.

"Head for Northport Harbor," he instructed me.

"How will I know it's Northport?"

"Oh, pick the first harbor you see," said George peevishly, diving into the cabin.

Stella followed him pretty soon.

"What's wrong with the pair of doves?" I inquired, when Bee came back to the stern of the boat.

"George has a headache, and Stella is stroking his temples," my wife informed me. "She has beautiful hands."

"One of these days she'll poke her ring finger in his eye, sticking it out at him that much," I observed.

My wife favored me with a scornful look.

"Can't you see that those two are in love, and want to be let alone?"

"One of 'em don't stand much chance

of being let alone as long as Stella can walk," said I.

After a while Stella emerged again. First thing she did was throw her arms around Bee.

"I'm so happy!" she cried. "You'd never guess—never!"

"No! What?" gurgled my wife.

"George and I are engaged. He asked me to marry him. Oh, I'm so happy!" chortled Stella.

Both girls hugged each other some more, and then they started a crying duet.

"Is that George groaning down there?" I asked presently.

Just for that nobody spoke to me until next morning.

About 4 A.M. it started to rain, forcing me to leave the deck and wriggle into the hatbox which had originally been assigned to me as sleeping quarters. When I squirmed out again, it was still raining, and it kept right on; so we spent most of that day—Thursday—playing bridge.

"George and I will be partners," said my wife. "You play with Stella. Married folks deserve a rest from each other's games."

Maybe Bee didn't know anything when she fixed it that way. Stella trumped the few aces I held, left me in a negative double, and generally behaved like a third-grade moron. If she had been paired with George, the best she would have got out of it would have been a chance to bring a breach of promise suit. Since I was the victim, however, her girlish giggles over her misplays amused him greatly.

I began to understand why the owner of Grayling had no carving knife aboard. Maybe it had rained before, and he had played bridge all day with some one like Stella. At night, feeling himself weakening, he had thrown the weapon overboard before the temptation to use it became overpowering.

In the late afternoon a fog seeped down and its gray mist hemmed us in so that we couldn't see ten feet beyond the boat.

"I'm afraid of this fog," George confessed. "We'll have to keep our foghorn going all night."

"That's all right. We'll get used to it and sleep anyway," I soothed him.

"Say," he demanded indignantly, "do you know what kind of horn they have on boats like this?"

"I can guess. What's the worst kind?"

"You have to blow it—blow it yourself, just like a bally bugle," he informed me. "You have to stay up all night and keep blowing it."

This was one time I outsmarted him.

"I'd love to help you, George," I said quickly, "but the last thing the doctor said to me before I left was, 'On no account let any foggy air into your lungs. It might be your death.'"

"When did you see a doctor?" Bee asked suspiciously.

"One of those times you were having a fitting," I answered promptly, and she had no reply to that.

About bedtime George decided that the fog wasn't so bad, and that we could chance riding through the night without his blowing the horn.

On Friday afternoon the fog lifted, but the breeze was still faint. By this time we had begun to feel like old residents of Northport Harbor, so we moved along before the local mariners started setting their courses by us. We drifted out on the outgoing tide.

Dusk saw not enough wind stirring to ruffle a canary's feathers; and there we were at the entrance to the harbor, "right in the path of any ships that might come along," as George comfortingly pointed out.

To our right, perhaps a hundred yards away, a narrow channel led into a lagoon which had been formed by dredges eating away a sand bank for builders' material.

"We'll put in there for the night," George decided.

"How?" I inquired—a perfectly sensible question, since Grayling hadn't moved more than her own length in the preceding half hour.

"One of us will have to get into the dinghy and tow the boat in," he answered. "The other had better stay on board and handle the wheel."

"I steer beautifully now," I volunteered.

Eventually we both got into the row-boat and began to pull. When I first boarded Grayling, I had regarded her as a mantel ornament, perhaps a trifle small, but elegant. I perceived now that I had done the ship an injustice. She was at least as big as a moderate-sized liner in the transatlantic trade.

"She weighs eleven tons," George groaned, as we tugged feverishly, bounding

back toward Grayling's bow after every pull.

"Is that all?" I asked skeptically.

In forty-five minutes we had her exactly even with the twin arms of sand which inclosed the entrance of the lagoon.

"How about anchoring here?" I panted.

"Can't—tugs!" George grunted.

In another half hour we had her twenty-five yards into the still, calm water. Never in my life did I hear anything so musical as the splash of her anchor.

We had just begun to breathe evenly again when the wind rose with a howl out of the night and raced over our deck, screeching in the rigging.

"That's what I call tough luck, after all our work," said George.

"Your restraint is admirable," said I.

"The exercise probably did you good," Bee observed.

"Is my poor little Georgie all tired out?" Stella cooed.

Guess who was married to whom!

IV

FOR some reason—probably because Bee and Stella had had enough of being galley slaves—a clambake on shore appealed to them as the ideal substitute for dinner. We rowed over to the Sound side of the lagoon and walked across a narrow strip of sandy beach. I carried a pail of clams that we had bought from a passing fisherman earlier in the day.

There was plenty of driftwood, and soon I had a roaring fire stabbing lances of flame at the moon. The clams went very well indeed. They were almost worth the several burns I sustained fishing them out of the fire for everybody.

By and by Stella and George wandered off along the beach, leaving me to my good wife for a long, heart-to-heart talk in that romantic spot, where every splash in the quiet lagoon waked a phosphorescent pool, and where the moon caressed the waters with the amorous softness of a scented South Sea evening.

"Say, look here, Bee!" I said gravely.

"If we don't get going early in the morning, I'll be out money. My option on Bill Phillips's place expires to-morrow noon, and I've got to reach him before then."

"Have you a buyer in mind for it?" Bee asked.

"Of course not!" I answered peevishly.

"I haven't taken it over yet."

"Then why worry about it?"

"It means money to me."

"If you sell it."

"Of course—if I sell it."

"But you just said you had no buyer in mind."

"Look here, Bee!" I protested. "I know my business. I've been buying and selling shore residence properties for ten years, and we've managed to live pretty well on what I've made. Can't you leave business to me?"

"If you don't want to discuss things calmly, very well," Bee sniffed; "but I should imagine it would be best to have a buyer before you invested your own money."

"It would be simpler to print my own money outright, but unfortunately they might arrest me for doing it."

"Oh, might they?"

Stella and George returned at this moment, saving the discussion from becoming—well, forceful.

What mariners term a spanking breeze was blowing the next morning at six o'clock, when I arose and quietly made preparations for departure. Before any one else appeared, I had the anchor hauled aboard and the sails set, and Grayling was nosing out of the lagoon.

When the rest came on deck, George took a long look at the Sound, alive with racing whitecaps.

"The breeze is a bit strong for this sort of boat," he objected.

"Too late now," I assured him.

"I'm afraid something unexpected might happen," he said earnestly.

"It is happening—the boat's moving."

"Really, I think it wiser to stay here."

"Not on your life!" I shouted. "Me for home and a square meal!"

"You're running a risk. How would you feel if a squall came up and Grayling capsized?"

"Wet, probably."

Thereat George realized that I was in earnest. He took the wheel. Though an experienced mariner, he did not last long. He refused breakfast.

I was sort of noticing myself that the boat was pitching a bit, but I managed to down a cup of lukewarm coffee. The girls agreed that they might as well wait until they got home, seeing it was only about a four-hour run at the rate we were bouncing

along. Anyway, they said the salt air took the edge off their appetites.

Presently George called me to the wheel in a frightful hurry, pointing with one hand to Execution Light, for which I was to head, while the other was clasped over his mouth.

I must say that George has gentlemanly instincts, even under trying circumstances. He moved right over and gave Stella a place when she joined him across the rail. I took deep gulps of air, more in hope than in faith, but somehow I managed to stick it until our bow plunged into the welcome calm of Larchmont Harbor.

Bee left me when we still had an hour to go. I thought she had succumbed, but I should have known better. She had gone down to the cabin to change her clothes. This home-coming offered the first opportunity for dressing since we had dined at the yacht club earlier in the week—and the second of the entire cruise.

I piled George and Stella and the nine suit cases into the club launch. Seven of them had not been opened.

On the next trip Bee and myself got in. George was waiting for us on the float. He was looking better. His complexion was now pale green, rather than the rich, pea-soupy effect it had exhibited earlier in the morning.

"It's against the club rules to tip attendants," George advised me, noticing that I was digging in a pocket.

"Is it?" I asked the sea chauffeur.

"Oh, yes, sir—it's one of a great many rules we have. It's even against the rules to serve liquor in the club, sir," the launch skipper agreed.

I took the hint.

On the way up to the clubhouse veranda, I was surprised to notice that the runway seemed to have been badly damaged since Monday. It was quite firm then, but now it seemed to sway at every step.

Bee bundled Stella into the first cab on line.

"I'll take good care of her, George," she

assured him. "Take George along and show him the Phillips place," she added, turning to me. "Stella and he want it for their home. I promised him you'd let him have it if that other buyer would release you."

"What other buyer?" I asked.

"The one you had to rush back to meet to-day," she replied with a sweet smile.

"Oh, yes!" I mumbled.

We stood and waved good-by to the departing heroines.

"You'll excuse me for a moment," I requested George. "I'll put a call through to my buyer, and ask him if he'll let his option go."

"Do, like a good fellow!"

I telephoned to Bill Phillips. I told him I was sending a check down by messenger—after I staked the club steward five dollars, he thought he could spare me one of his boys—and to have the deeds for me on Monday morning.

"I managed it," I informed George, on rejoining him. "The fellow didn't want to let go, but as a favor to me—"

"It's awfully good of you—frightfully sporting," said George. He was coming back to normal. "I suspect, though, I owe my gratitude to Bee. She promised to use her influence."

"She used it, all right," I admitted. "How long ago was it that she made the promise?"

"Before I popped the question to Stella at all," George replied. "It was last Saturday evening, if I remember rightly. I was saying to Bee that if I ever persuaded Stella to marry me, I should have to be looking around to buy a home. She told me not to worry, for you had the exact place, only it was promised, but if I wanted it, she'd make you let me have it. You mustn't tell her, though, because she swore me to keep it from you. Decent of Bee, wasn't it?"

"Very decent!" I agreed heartily. "Shall we go and have a look at it?"

"Right-o!" said George.

A WOMAN'S LOVE

HER tenderness, her care for me, her trust—

I number these among my gratuities;

Her hopes for me, her ceaseless love—I must

Count these as my supreme beatitudes.

Clinton Scollard

Cut to Pattern

TEDDIE CARRINGTON, A SUCCESSFUL NEWCOMER IN NEW YORK SOCIETY, HAS A DAY OF SOMEWHAT MIXED EXPERIENCES

By Rida Johnson Young

MRS. STEPHEN CARRINGTON came through the black marble and bronze entrance of an apartment house in Park Avenue at exactly a quarter past twelve in the morning. It was the correct hour for a brisk walk up the avenue, then west along Fifty-Fifth Street, down Fifth Avenue, east through Forty-Fourth Street, and so again to Park Avenue, where she was due at one o'clock for luncheon at the Périgord, the newest, the most expensive, and quite the smartest restaurant in New York.

Mrs. Carrington sported the Park Avenue livery, which at present distinguishes all servants of the vogue. She wore a long, sober coat of severely straight lines, with a sleek, upstanding collar of fur about the throat. A small felt hat was drawn closely down over her brow, with a little peak at its top, upon which perched a perky little bow of black velvet ribbon. Her feet were shod in the newest suède walking pump, with a high Cuban heel, and with a long tongue, on which there was a dull bronze buckle. Her stockings were of a discreet shade something between the "nude" of Broadway and the "Indian" of Harlem and thereabouts, and entirely different from both of them. This shade is the only permissible one for street wear, except gauzy gun metal, which a few of the *conoscenti* favor.

Under her arm she carried a large flat purse. A mauve gardenia nestled in the fur at her throat. She would not have been guilty of wearing a real gardenia, or even an artificial one of the natural color. She knew that a flower is smart only when it is art.

She was comfortably conscious that the gay lining of her coat exactly matched the gown she wore beneath it. She was serene

in the correctness of her straight corset *brassière*, which modeled without confining the figure, and of the dainty wisp of linen and lace that covered it. To her skin she was correct! It was a great satisfaction, though she felt a bit chilly.

Ahead of her she could pick out those of her kind as they emerged, one by one, from the various Italian Renaissance or New York Gothic portals. It was like looking at her own back in multiple. The other people coming toward her, facing the wrong way, she did not see. Even the comfortable folk in automobiles were mainly negligible to her. One walked up Park Avenue in the morning. In the afternoon one used the car. It had somehow been settled that way by the all-powerful "they" who standardize things.

Perhaps it had arisen from the one-time necessity of airing the dog. Dogs were slightly *démodé* now, but the morning walk persisted. Perhaps it was for the benefit of the figure. Anyway, it was a thing that was done, and Mrs. Carrington was doing it, although she would have much preferred the luxurious comfort of her limousine.

She was only twenty-four years old, and there was a long life of conformity before her. Sometimes she sensed this, with a vague discomfort and a yearning, backward glance to her free youth; but this was only a subconscious yearning, for she was fully aware that she was getting what every normal girl wants from life.

She had married into an aristocratic and wealthy family. Stephen Carrington's mother was a pattern of easy correctness, his sisters also, and Stephen himself could have been put upon exhibition as a perfect type of the young man who knows how, when, and what to do.

There had been a time when the Carrington-

ton idea of correctness had slightly puzzled her. It permitted free ways, free thoughts, and free actions which would have greatly shocked her own respectable middle-class family; but there was a correctness even in incorrectness. She had found that out, and had quickly got into step with it, without a noticeable stumble or a perceptible blush.

As Mrs. Carrington rounded the corner into Park Avenue again, and approached the entrance to the Périgord, she was halted by a crisp: "Hello, old thing!" in Marjorie DeWitt's high, insolent voice from behind her.

As she turned, Marjorie's eyes took her in from top to toe with the keen, searching gaze of a drill sergeant examining the accouterments of a recruit.

"Lo, old dear!" returned Mrs. Carrington languidly, as if completing a password.

"Pass, friend!" said Marjorie mentally, or something to that effect; and they went together into the Périgord.

It was five minutes past one. An appearance at five minutes before the hour made one seem too eager; on the hour precisely, too subservient to one's hostess. Five minutes past was about right; although there were some privileged persons who would not show up until a quarter or twenty minutes past, with a negligent "So sorry!" at having kept the luncheon waiting. Mrs. Carrington had not yet reached quite that height of independence.

There was a pleasant twitter, as of artificial birds, in the green and gold cage of the dressing room, accompanied by a preening of plumage and perhaps a slight sharpening of beaks and claws. Coats were laid aside, and gay gowns blossomed like a bed of tulips when the winter covering is removed. In color, the livery was varied, now, but the cut and line were there—straight sleeveless gowns, displaying long white arms upon which bracelets glittered and flashed.

"Teddie," said Mrs. Carrington's hostess, as they went side by side to the dining room, "I want you to come in for bridge at half past four this afternoon."

Theodora was Mrs. Carrington's old-fashioned name, but every one knew her as Teddie.

"So sorry—I'm having three tables myself," she answered.

"Cat! That's why I'm having such a devil of a time filling in the twelfth!" said her hostess, serenely indifferent in her reve-

lation of the fact that Teddie was being asked only as a filler-in at the last moment.

Teddie had often found herself in this position. She had been accepted by Stephen's set, but was not a preferred member. There was a sacred inner circle—girls who had gone to the same schools and dancing classes, whose fathers and mothers had known one another. Teddie whirled about on the outer edge of this circle, and was sometimes pulled in when she was needed.

The consciousness of this fact always aroused every ounce of the fighting spirit which she possessed in no slight degree. She was determined to be in the inner circle. She had already made much progress. Her children, if she ever had any, should be the very axis of it!

II

As they took their places at the table, Teddie found on her right some one whom she had never seen before. The stranger was a good-looking woman with a bright, merry face. Her clothes were of the proper cut, but—Teddie's appraising eyes went over her—there was some subtle difference. Oh, yes—it was her hair. She had too much hair. Her hat did not snuggle properly at the back of her neck.

"What a charming restaurant!" said the bright-faced woman. Her voice was sweet and well modulated, but lacked the something *chic*, the half American, half English, clipped accent, so much in vogue. "I've never been here before."

"Really?" said Teddie.

The woman felt the astonishment in Teddie's tone.

"I'm not a New Yorker," she said. "My name is Merwin. I'm Mrs. Reynolds's cousin." Mrs. Reynolds was their hostess. "I'm visiting her. I suspect she finds it rather an infliction."

The stranger laughed slightly. Her eye was so merry, and she seemed so free, so careless of any one's opinion, that Teddie's not thoroughly sophisticated heart warmed to her.

"Why should you think that?" she asked.

"Oh, well, you know, a country cousin! Relations always are rather a bore, aren't they? One has to have them, I suppose. I always want to go to a hotel, but they can't allow that. *Noblesse oblige*, you see."

This was delightful. The woman was

actually poking a sly bit of fun at their hostess. Few persons took such a liberty with Mrs. Reynolds, whose importance was too well recognized.

"Are you in New York often?" asked Teddie.

"Not more often than I can help. Business brings me here occasionally, and then I like to poke about the big libraries. We haven't a decent reference library in Swampscott. That's my town," she explained, with a laughing lift of an eyebrow. "It's rather hard on Cousin Nina, my coming from Swampscott, isn't it?"

"She thinks I'm a snob," thought Teddie. "Well, I am. I shan't tell her that I come from an even smaller town than Swampscott, and one with a funnier name, too." Then she found herself saying, amazingly:

"It's not so bad as coming from Cos Cob. That's my town!"

"Really?" said Mrs. Merwin. "I took you for a dyed-in-the-wool New Yorker."

"You flatter my chief ambition," said Teddie, with a sly little humorous twist to her mouth, such as it had not taken on for many a day.

"My dear child," exclaimed Mrs. Merwin, "don't tell me you have a sense of humor! You mustn't, you know—not if you want to be taken for a New Yorker, as from your confession you do."

"Oh, come now!" said Teddie. "We're the gayest people on earth here."

"Gay, yes—in a dreadfully routine way. You have a sense of fun. You laugh at grotesque things, like children; but a sense of humor? No! One can't have that unless one is ready to laugh at one's self."

"Perhaps we don't see anything in ourselves to laugh at."

"That's just it. That proves my point," said Mrs. Merwin complacently, and turned to her plate of *hors d'œuvres*, as if the subject were settled.

Teddie stiffened a bit. Really this woman was rather too self-assured, considering that she didn't belong at all. She was probably filled with spite at feeling herself an outsider.

Teddie turned a cold shoulder toward Mrs. Merwin, and began a conversation with Nancy Stiles, who was at her left. It was not really a conversation, however, because Nancy never talked to women any more than she could help. She regarded it as a waste of mental energy. She could

be quite entertaining at a tea dance, or at night, when the men were about, but she saved herself up for it all day.

"Really! Quite! Ripping! Only fancy that!" were the responses that Teddie received to her conversational advances; and after a few moments she found herself turning to Mrs. Merwin again.

"I used to like to poke about big libraries, too," she said, taking up a former remark of her neighbor's in a spirit of defense.

"Really?" Mrs. Merwin looked at her with pleased animation. "It's lots of fun, isn't it? I'm going to the library of the New York Historical Society after luncheon. I'm working on a story of old New York life, and I've got to bone up."

"A story? Oh, are you Agatha Merwin, the novelist?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Merwin. "Cousin Nina doesn't advertise it much. I suppose it is discreditable having a working woman in the family."

"I am so glad to know you," said Teddie eagerly. "I loved 'Shoreward.' Nancy!" She turned to the silent Miss Stiles. "This is Agatha Merwin, who wrote 'Shoreward.'"

"Really?" said Nancy, peering around at Mrs. Merwin with a faint light of interest in her eyes. "It must take a lot of—er—energy to write a book."

"It would require a lot more energy for me to stop writing," said Mrs. Merwin, with a twinkle. "It's my curse."

"Fancy that!" remarked Nancy in a bewildered tone, and she lapsed back into herself.

Several of the other women were looking at Mrs. Merwin with a sort of alien interest, as at a curiosity, their attention having been attracted by Teddie's somewhat too enthusiastic tone.

Mrs. Reynolds frowned slightly. She had hoped to keep her rather unfashionable cousin inconspicuous at the table. Of course there was something distinguished in being a writer, but no one else in their set was doing it. It seemed a trifle *outré* in a member of her family.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I thought you girls all knew. Dear Agatha is no end of a highbrow. We're frightfully proud of her!"

Mrs. Merwin looked down at her plate with a slightly malicious smile upon her lips. She fully understood her cousin's half

proud, half abashed thought. She was not even a smart novelist. She wrote about the doings of her commonplace neighbors. If she had been Edith Wharton, or some one like that, Cousin Nina might have been wholly proud of their relationship.

It was a very correct luncheon, not too light and not too heavy. At its end every one smoked. Mrs. Merwin smoked evidently because she enjoyed it. Teddie lit her cigarette with a feeling of performing a rather disagreeable rite. She had never learned to like the taste of tobacco.

When the party broke up, limousines were waiting for most of the guests. Teddie had not ordered hers, as she was only a block from home. She found herself walking down the street with Mrs. Merwin.

"I'm going to walk over to Eighth Avenue and take the car there," said Mrs. Merwin.

"Eighth Avenue?" Teddie remembered vaguely that there was an Eighth Avenue on the west side of town. "Why didn't you have the car come here for you?"

"The street car."

"Oh!"

"I like riding in them. One sees types. I like to walk, too, after luncheon."

"So do I," said Teddie, "though I never seem to have time. There's usually some dressmaker or something before tea. I have an hour or so now. Would you mind my going with you?"

"I'd love it," replied Mrs. Merwin.

She tucked her arm within Teddie's and drew her around the corner.

How odd! Teddie hoped no one would see them walking like that—arm in arm, like two schoolgirls. She wondered why on earth she had felt impelled to offer her company. It was the oddest, most impulsive thing to do, and she had grown accustomed not to act upon impulse.

When they reached Fifth Avenue, Mrs. Merwin suddenly changed her mind about the street car.

"Oh, do let's ride on top of the bus!" she said. "We can take a Riverside Drive bus and walk through to the Historical Society place."

At that moment the traffic whistle blew.

"Come on!" cried Mrs. Merwin, still grasping Teddie's arm.

They ran—actually ran—across the street, and boarded a bus which was halted there. Mrs. Merwin was laughing, as with a thrill of adventure, as they mounted the

steep little stairs to the top. Teddie followed mechanically. Really this was a most unusual thing for her to be doing!

It was rather nice up there, though, in the free air, looking down upon the tops of motor cars and the heads of the crowds upon the sidewalk. It took Teddie back—Suddenly she found herself telling Mrs. Merwin about her adventurous girlhood. She had come to New York with the ambition to be a writer. She had written, too—lots of things, some of which had been accepted. She had been very poor. Riding on the top of a Fifth Avenue bus had been her chief relaxation and delight in those days, she found herself confessing.

Mrs. Merwin was much interested.

Teddie told her how she had happened to meet Stephen Carrington. So absorbed was she in happy memories that she did not notice, when they passed the Puritan Club, that her husband was sitting there in the window with another man.

Though Carrington was staring out into the street, he did not see her, either. He would not have believed it was she, had he caught a glimpse of her on the top of a bus.

"I loathe December," he was saying, as the vehicle lumbered past.

"Why?" asked Paul Delaney, who lounged in a chair by his side.

"So in between—too late for golf or polo—nothing but dinners and things. Wish I were at Palm Beach right now!"

"Old man, there'd be nobody there!"

True. This was unanswerable. There would only be a couple of thousand nobodies who paid no attention to the proper season.

"I'm fed up," said Stephen gloomily. "Frightfully fed up!"

"Feeling a bit off, eh? Why don't you get that boxer fellow—you know—I trained with him last year. He'll put you in shape in a jiff. Your liver needs a jolt. You're looking a bit green."

"Oh, I'm fit, all right," said Stephen impatiently. He rose and stretched. "Too fit, as a matter of fact—lots of energy, and nothing to spend it on but cards and dancing and food!"

He turned away and went toward the door.

"The name's Murphy," Delaney called after him. "You'll find it in the phone book. Have a go with Murphy, old chap. Do you a world of good."

"Thanks," said Stephen, feeling inclined to damn Murphy and Paul Delaney and everything else in the flat, stale world.

III

THE Puritan was a morgue of a club, he decided, as he took his hat and coat and went out into the street. He went there because his father and grandfather and great-grandfather had been members. It was very exclusive and deadily dull. One could never find any one there but old dodderers and nit-wits like Paul Delaney.

As he strode down the avenue, trying by the energy of his walk to convince himself and others that he had some determined destination, he wondered why in thunder he hadn't. There seemed to be no place he wanted to go and nothing he wanted to do.

There was always the office, but there was nothing to do there. The trustees of the Carrington estate attended to all that. He wished his father had not planned everything to make it so easy for him. Only in the event of his mother's death would he have any voice in the administration of the estate. All he had to do was to draw checks, and sometimes to sit in on a board meeting in a very bewildered and dissatisfied state of mind.

Far, far down the avenue the sky was a beautiful deep blue, and there was a soft, fleecy cloud floating there, almost golden in the sharp sunlight. The cloud seemed to hang above Washington Square or thereabouts—somewhere near the old studio building off the square, where he had first met Teddie.

If Teddie had only been different, he thought! He loved her, but she was a disappointment. He had expected different things of Teddie. Women were so darned adaptable! She had flowed into the smart world like wax into a mold, and what he had liked about her at first was that she had seemed different.

His mind went back to the circumstances of their meeting, which stood out vividly in his memory.

It was on just such a day as this. He had felt fed up, just as he felt to-day. Encountering Mac Warner on the street, he had been invited to go to Mac's studio, to hear a famous violinist who was to play there at tea.

Warner was a sculptor of the dilettante order. He knew everybody in the worlds of fashion and of art. He had an apart-

ment uptown and a studio down town, and always seemed to be having a wonderful time with life.

"I loathe teas!" Stephen had protested.

"You won't loathe this one," Mac told him. "Come on! I've got a couple of the Follies girls coming."

"Oh, hang the Follies girls!" Stephen had replied, but he had gone, nevertheless.

In the studio there was a great crush of people—music, cocktails, cigarettes, and chatter—the usual thing. After the first few uncomfortable moments of it, Stephen had quickly become oblivious of the whole affair. He was completely and immediately absorbed in a little girl in a shabby blue gown who was occupying a corner behind a huge unfinished statue, to which he had gone in the hope of escaping attention. He loved music, and he wanted to listen to the violinist in peace.

"I beg your pardon," he had said, when he found the girl seated there on a model stand.

"Oh, it's all right!" she replied. "Come into my parlor. You can breathe here."

"Fine! Thanks!" he said, and seated himself beside her.

"I hid here because I felt so shabby," the girl volunteered, rather astonishingly. "You see, I thought it was a regular studio party, but it's quite a smart crowd, isn't it? The women are all so well dressed, and I'm so ashamed of myself! I'm afraid I have an inferiority complex."

"Good Lord! What's that?" asked Stephen.

"Oh, of course, you wouldn't know," she replied. "I suspect you're one of them out there."

"I don't know a soul here except our host. I really came to hear Askenazy play," said Stephen.

"So did I. I can't afford concerts, and I'm so hungry for music!"

Stephen liked the girl immediately. There was no nonsense about her. She was so honest, saying just exactly the thing that came into her mind at the moment.

He told her his name—which, he saw with surprise, had no significance for her. Then he asked hers.

"Teddie Marshall," she said. "S-sh!" she added.

The chatter had subsided, and Askenazy was going to play. They sat in silence. Teddie's gaze was far away, her face rapturous. Stephen's eyes were upon her the

whole time. He seemed to be hearing the music through her ears, to be sharing her delight very intimately there in the silence.

When the music was over, they crept out together, as if by prearrangement, and went away without saying good-by to their host, out into the soft twilight.

"I didn't want to speak to any one in there after Askenazy played," Teddie said. "I didn't want to lose those lovely sounds so quickly."

Impulsively he invited her to dinner, but she refused, reverting in a very human and girlish way to the subject of her shabby gown.

"It's just devilish being so poor," she said. "It cuts you out of so many things. I may not always be poor, though. I'm a writer. I've sold three stories, but we had to eat them right up, and I couldn't buy any decent clothes."

"We?"

"The girl I room with. She's an artist, but not very successful as yet. We sort of share things. I simply couldn't have gone to-day if she hadn't loaned me this hat. You may not believe it, but I have nothing but a tam."

"A tam?" Stephen asked, thinking for the moment that she meant some sort of dog.

"You know—one of those flat Scotch effects."

"Oh! Like those the artist chaps wear in Paris?"

"Yes. They're cheap, and they last forever. We pretend we like tams, and smocks, and all that; but it's only because we can't afford anything else."

They both laughed and felt somehow as if they had known each other for a long, long time.

It ended by Stephen accompanying her to a little obscure place in Greenwich Village, where she was accustomed to dine when in funds.

That was how it had happened. The thing had gone on from there—a rapid, happy courtship on the tops of busses, in the parks, in gallery seats at concerts, and at the theaters.

It had never entered Teddie's head that Stephen was rich. It pleased him that she had asked no questions, had taken it for granted that the simple pleasures he offered her were all that he could afford. He had never known a girl who was so disin-

terested. He enjoyed the unusual experience of being liked for himself alone.

Well, in a very short time they were married in a little obscure church down town. He hadn't wanted any fuss or protests from his family. He hadn't wanted Teddie to feel unwelcome, as would have been the case had his mother been forewarned.

IV

As Stephen strode down the avenue, he thought with aching longing of his honeymoon. How delightful it had been to let Teddie know that she could have anything she wanted. There had been an orgy of shopping before they went away. She had been frankly delighted to find that he had so much money; but she was very much in love with him, and he with her, and that mattered most.

Then they had come back to New York, and his mother and sisters had taken hold of her. She had been standardized. How quickly it had been accomplished! There wasn't anything of his old comrade left now. Mrs. Stephen Carrington was a woman of the world, moving about mechanically, following set rules, and having very little time for her husband.

"Oh, hang it!" he thought. "Maybe she knew all the time. Perhaps she was angling for me with her ingenuousness. All any woman wants is ease and comfort and money to throw about!"

No, no—not Teddie! Stephen quickly discarded the unfair thought. She had been different once. There had been an uncalculating pleasure in those first few days of their acquaintance, and there was no forgetting the rapture of the beginning of their married life. They had talked about serious things, exchanged real ideas, visioned some meaning to life, up there in his camp in the Maine woods, to which he had taken her. What subtle thing was it that had crept in and spoiled everything?

Perhaps, he thought, if they could go away again to some quiet spot where there were no smart people, they might recapture some of the old joy; but everybody would think it odd if they did that. The place in Palm Beach was being put into readiness for them. The house was being redecorated, Stephen had just bought a new yacht, and the motor boats were being overhauled. It would be rather jolly down there if you could get away from the old round of com-

petition in entertainment; but as things were it was worse there than in New York, because society was more concentrated. You were constantly on exhibition, as it were. You simply had to do the proper thing, and to do it a little better and more lavishly than the other fellow.

He walked rapidly, absorbed in impatient and obscure dissatisfaction. Before he realized it, he was at Twelfth Street. He paused on the corner there. Far down, near Eighth Avenue, was the house where Teddie had lived; and mechanically Stephen turned down that way.

It was almost with a feeling of surprise that he found the house still there, and as shabby as ever. The thought of it had faded from his mind like the memory of an old dream.

He went up the steps and into the little entry, and looked at the names there beside the push buttons. Maida Ronald! So she was still there—Teddie's one-time friend, who had dropped out of their lives, though for a time they had resolutely tried to keep in touch with her.

Stephen pressed the button, and it was with a thrill that he heard the remembered click of the latch. He climbed the steep, dark stairway and found Maida peering over the rail at the top.

"Well, for the love of Mikel!" she exclaimed. "Sir Aubrey Vere de Vere himself! Come in, stranger!"

He followed her into the high, sky lighted room.

"Stranger! I like that!" he said. "You're the stranger! It's a crime, the way you've thrown us down!"

"I can't afford to waste time," said Maida. With a careless motion she swept some sketches from the one comfortable chair in the room. "Sit down. I'll give you some tea. I'll just put the kettle on."

She fluttered across the room to the Japanese screen that concealed her culinary arrangements.

Stephen looked about with a strange twinge at his heart. Once he had glimpsed something of freedom here in this shabby old room. Even now life's confining bands seemed to loosen. One had a feeling of possessing one's self.

"How's Teddie?" asked Maida.

With characteristic impetuosity, she was gathering up the various incongruous articles from the center table and depositing them in a heap upon the couch, prepar-

tory to setting the table for tea. She was always moving things about in that way, from place to place, when she needed a table or chair. It would have been much simpler to keep things in their proper places, but that would have been too confining to her method of thought.

"Teddie's all right," said Stephen. "How are you coming on?"

"Fine! I'm being kept alive by doing place cards and favors. Nobody seems to hanker for my masterpieces."

She nodded her head toward a row of miniatures in a case against the wall.

"Teddie could get you a lot of clients, if you'd let her."

"Yes, I know; but I'd have to do the social stunt—lick boots—play politics."

"But you'll have to do all that anyway, if you want to get on, won't you?"

"It depends upon how good my work is," said Maida. "If it's good enough, some one will find it out. Clients will come. If it isn't any good, I don't want to be an object of charity. Anyway, with me, it's the joy of the work itself. I'm getting a lot out of life. I have a mean spirit, I suppose. I don't want to say thank you to any one."

"But an old friend like Teddie!"

"See here, Stephen!" said Maida. "I was awfully fond of Teddie—you know that; but we're miles apart now. We don't know what to say to each other when we meet. She tries, and I try, but it's gone. We're just living in two different worlds. She's changed and I've stayed put, I suppose. I want to stay just as I am. I like my freedom. It's shabby, perhaps, but it's mine!"

"Seems to me you'd be more free if you earned more money."

"Money hasn't made Teddie free. She had a nice little talent. She could have done something. I don't despise money, but I'm afraid of it. I'd go after it tooth and nail if I thought I'd know how to use it; but I think perhaps it would just use me, as it does every one else."

"What do you mean, how to use it?" asked Stephen. "Uplift bunk, and all that sort of stuff?"

"No, not exactly; but it ought to bring you more of life, not less. It shouldn't be your master. It shouldn't bind you to a certain way of living and acting. Oh, I've seen it so often! I've seen men and girls struggling on here, half starving and happy."

Then they make a ten-strike and begin to get a paunch and a dissatisfied expression; and soon they move away, and I don't know what becomes of them!"

She made a gesture as if she didn't care, either, as she went to fetch the teakettle.

"You seem to blame everything on the possession of money," said Stephen. "I suppose you think rich people don't do any good in the world. There's provision in my father's will for all sorts of hospitals and charities and things. We're not all entirely selfish and absorbed in hanging on to our loot."

"I know. It isn't that. I don't know that doling out funds to organized charity is any good. There's nothing personal about it—nothing that touches one's real self. Great wealth makes living a sort of hidebound ceremony. With me, life is just one grand spree!"

They both laughed.

"So you're quite satisfied with life?" asked Stephen, as she came back to the table.

"Good Heavens, no! I'd like to fall in love with some one, and marry, and have babies."

"God help them!"

"He would. He'd have to, because I shouldn't fret over them. Do you know," she added, suddenly serious, "there's only one thing I ever envied Teddie, and that is that she has really known what it is to love; for she did, Stephen. She married you absolutely without a thought as to who or what you were."

"I know that."

"I used to ache with envy sometimes, just seeing you look at each other. I've never met any man I felt that way about, and I don't suppose I ever will. Money or no money, freedom or no freedom, I'm missing the one great satisfaction in life—a big, understanding mutual love. It must be wonderful!"

She looked at him with a smile, and he tried to put assurance into the smile and tone with which he answered:

"It is! It's fine!"

He wondered where the understanding mutual love had flown from his and Teddie's routine existence; but Maida changed the subject abruptly, and began to talk of other things.

When he left her, he walked slowly up the street, absorbed in a thought which she had given him. If love was the only satis-

faction in life, how was a fellow to keep it fresh and alive? It always died out. Stephen could see it in the lives of every one around him. It seemed almost bad form to want that sort of thing to continue after marriage.

He took a cab at Fifth Avenue, and was lurched and jolted rapidly homeward. He hated the cab, he hated the streets, he was tired of the eternal routine of life. He felt that he would almost welcome a smash-up. A hospital and somebody making a fuss over him would at least be different.

"I'll talk to Teddie to-night," he thought. "I'll tell her we're not going to Palm Beach. We'll hop on a steamer and go abroad. Not the Riviera—somewhere out of the crowd. We'll just poke around together. She won't like it, but I've got to break away. Wish she'd go without a maid—just we two, poking around; but I suppose that's a lot to ask." He thought of his own man, who was very exigent with him. "I suppose Harris'll think it odd if I don't take him. I don't give a darn what he thinks. I want to dodge the whole works!"

Stephen thought feverishly and confusedly, like a prisoner planning a desperate attempt to escape.

V

TEDDIE arrived at her apartment at ten minutes to five o'clock. She, too, was in a state of determined revolt. Her afternoon with Mrs. Merwin had awakened a dormant dissatisfaction which she had resolutely denied, even to herself.

Mrs. Merwin was free. She had work which interested her. What fun they had had, sleuthing through old manuscripts for some information that was necessary to the writing of her story! Teddie had helped her. Their fingers had grown grubby from handling old books and pamphlets.

For the time, Teddie had forgotten that she was Mrs. Stephen Carrington. She had felt herself back in the old life, where there had been a keen thrill in the acquirement of knowledge, an exquisite pleasure in creative work; where one could forget one's self in one's absorption in the thing to be done.

As she went for the fourth time to consult the card catalogue, she had seen by the clock over the desk that it was half past four, and had awakened from her pleasant absorption with a shock.

Half past four! The bridge guests were already assembling at her apartment! Good Heavens! And Mrs. Phil Cramer coming! Stephen would never forgive her if she offended Mrs. Phil!

She had said a hasty good-by to Mrs. Merwin, and, running downstairs and out into the street, had hailed a cab. All the way home her mind seethed and boiled with revolt. You couldn't do anything you really wanted in this world. There was always some inescapable social duty to perform. Oh, how sick of it all she was!

"I'll tell Stephen," she thought. "I can't go on like this. I've got to have something real to do. What's the use of all our money, if we have to conform and conform and conform! I had a better time when I was poor. Stephen used to be different then. Why, we don't properly enjoy even music any more! What is the opera now? Purely a social function. We come in late, and leave long before the end. If the right people don't come into our box, the whole evening is spoiled. We used to sit in the gallery and hold hands. He would think that vulgar now, and so would I. I don't want to hold hands, but I do want something more than I'm getting from life!"

On arriving at the apartment, she found that she need not have fretted about being late. Her guests were quite comfortable in the drawing-room, with cocktails and tea. One always could count on the butler to do the right thing. In fact, Frederick was more skilled than she in social usage. She had learned a great deal from him.

As her maid's skillful fingers made the necessary change in her dress, Teddie hastily framed a polite fiction about her motor breaking down. At five o'clock she was seated at a bridge table, with Mrs. Phil Cramer opposite her. Mrs. Cramer was much in demand. One had to ask her weeks in advance for even an informal two hours of bridge like this. Teddie reflected that Stephen would be pleased to know that she had come.

Teddie's eyes ran appraisingly about the room, with a hostess's meticulous gaze. It was a satisfying room, with the soft curtains drawn over the windows and the flattering candles lighted. There were bridge lamps at the corners of the tables, and lovely, absorbed faces bent over the cards in the reflected light. The card room opened off the drawing-room, and one could

see the subdued opulence of the latter stretching away in the distance.

The Carrington apartment occupied the entire top floor of the building, and was one of the most beautifully appointed in the city. Teddie reflected with satisfaction that no matter how much she had had to learn, it hadn't been necessary for her to cultivate good taste.

They played for high stakes. These women liked the excitement of winning or losing large amounts. They gambled like this at the close of almost every day. It was a fillip to their jaded nerves.

When Stephen came in, at twenty minutes to seven, the party was breaking up, and the women were engaged in the serious business of settling their debts. They brightened up at the appearance of a male creature, and chattered at him with animation. Stephen was a very attractive fellow. A few guests lingered for a friendly cocktail with him. It was seven o'clock before they had all gone.

"I say, Teddie!" said Stephen, wondering what Teddie would do or say if he should clasp her in his arms and ask her if all the old rapturous love were dead. "I'd like to have a serious talk with you."

Teddie looked at him with a flutter of hope. Could it be possible that Stephen, too, was feeling some lack in their life? She felt that she wanted to run to him, put her arms about his neck and her head on his shoulder, and beg him to come near to her again in spirit; but he would have thought that queer, she decided.

"Anything wrong?" she asked.

"No, but I've been thinking—"

At that moment Teddie's secretary came to the drawing-room door.

"Mrs. Cameron's dinner is at half past seven to-night," she reminded Teddie. "She's having it early, on account of the theater."

"Oh!" Teddie felt disappointed and baffled. "Well, we can't talk now, Stephen. We'll have to scramble into our clothes in ten minutes."

Teddie went reluctantly toward the door. Stephen seemed in just the proper mood to receive her ultimatum of revolt, but it would have to be put off.

"I don't see why she wants to drag us to a beastly show!" said Stephen, as he followed his wife into the hall and toward their rooms. "I'm fed up on the eternal sex question in the theater."

"So am I. I'm fed up on a lot of things!" said Teddie, as she went into her room.

Stephen felt encouraged. If Teddie was feeling that way, it would make things easier. He decided to spring the matter of ducking the bunch, and running away by themselves, in the car on the way to the dinner.

While they were hastily dressing, the Weirs, who lived on the floor below, called up and asked if they might go with them to Mrs. Cameron's. One of their cars was in the shop, and their daughter wanted the other for the night.

"Too bad!" thought Stephen. "Well, we'll have it out to-night when we come home."

The dinner was perfect. Mrs. Cameron's *chef* was noted, and her wines were particularly fine. Stephen enjoyed the meal, and began to feel less dissatisfied with things.

He looked at Teddie down at the other end of the table. How radiant she was! She was a winner, all right! Clever! She had been an absolute outsider, and now—well, if Teddie kept on, she'd soon be giving Mrs. Phil Cramer a race of it for ruler of the roost!

This life they were leading wouldn't be so bad, if they could only keep closer together. They ought to put aside at least one or two days a week just for each other, or for some serious purpose, some—well, he didn't know just what!

They were late for the theater, of course. They came in in the middle of the first act. People glared at them, but they didn't mind. You don't mind any one's opinion when you know who you are, and especially after cocktails and three perfect wines. You have a feeling that whatever is going on is going on for you exclusively, and be hanged to the others!

After the theater they went to the house of Phil Cramer's mother, where a dance was in progress. The elder Mrs. Cramer was quite an important person, though not so absolutely a leader as was her smart daughter-in-law. Mrs. Phil made a great fuss over Teddie. She also made a date with Stephen for luncheon the next day.

It was three o'clock in the morning when the Carringtons said good night to the Weirs, and were carried up in the lift to their apartment.

"Darned good party!" remarked

Stephen, as a sleepy second man let them into the flower-scented entrance hall.

"Yes, ripping!" Teddie was looking pleased. There was almost an effect of purring in her voice. "Mrs. Phil wants us to cancel our reservations and go with them on their private car to Palm Beach."

"Fine and dandy!" said Stephen. "You *are* coming on!"

They went into their respective rooms.

"I must have had indigestion to-day," thought Stephen, as he undressed. "You can't just chuck things. People would think it odd. Besides, I don't think I have so much of a kick at life. Of course, some day we'll want to break away and do something different, but—I wonder if Mrs. Phil meant anything! I wonder if she isn't a bit fed up on old Phil!"

Stephen looked at himself complacently in the glass. What had she meant about a little devil in his eyes? Well, if it came to that, perhaps there was, he thought with a grin. She'd better not tempt it to come out!

Teddie was not undressing. She was puzzling over the appointment book at the desk in her sitting room. She would have to do some juggling with her dates for the coming day. Mrs. Phil had insisted upon her coming for tea and bridge at five. It was evident that she had made up her mind to make an intimate of Teddie. Of course, one couldn't refuse her.

Teddie's eyes ran down the list of appointments in her secretary's neat, precise hand:

Nine o'clock—*masseuse*.

Ten o'clock—breakfast and correspondence.

Eleven o'clock—*hairedresser*.

Twelve to one—walk.

One—Mrs. Waters, lunch.

Half past two—gowns to be fitted.

Half past three—exhibition at the Rumson Galleries.

Half past four—Eleanor Wiley, bridge and tea.

Eleanor would have to be canceled. She was good-natured, and wouldn't mind. Teddie left a note upon the desk instructing her secretary to call up in the morning and tell Miss Wiley that she would have to find a substitute.

She went to bed feeling that she had had a very successful day. She had been tired and nervous in the afternoon, it was true, but she felt all right now—quite all right, and a bit triumphant. Even Stephen's mother had never succeeded in being really intimate with the Cramers!

A Slave to Beauty

THE SKIPPER OF THE IMOGENE COMES HOME TO ENCOUNTER
A NEW CULT ON CAPE ELIZABETH

By Elmer Brown Mason

CAPTAIN ELIAS BULFINCH shoved the last pile of bills across the fore-castle table and rose wearily to his feet.

"Ye'll see to cleanin' up the vessel," he directed Seth Pushard. "Git her good an' clean. We'll sail in a week fer 'nother halibut trip."

"Don't give a feller time even to begin spendin' his money!" Pushard grumbled. "Well, I'll see to it."

"Low ye'd better." Captain Bulfinch glared at Seth. "Ain't no use suggestin' 'at ye keep sober, s'pose?"

"Not a mite!" Seth agreed cheerfully, and followed up to the deck.

Captain Bulfinch climbed stiffly from his schooner, the Imogene, to Commercial Wharf, and clumped down its length to the street. He had brought in the vessel himself, with a six-hour stretch at the wheel, had sold his fish and paid off the crew, and now he was very tired. Fervently he wished that he were out at the little white house on Cape Elizabeth.

Julia, his wife, would be looking for him. There would be a tub of hot water, and plenty of towels; and then a long sleep in his own bed, on his own mattress, which sloped up at the top in a great bump much more comfortable than a wad of pillows. He sighed a yearning sigh at thought of the mattress. The blue and green quilt over him—

The captain came back to the present with a jerk. He was actually going to sleep standing up while he waited for the street car. Well, there it was at last! He would tell Bill Wallace, the conductor, to wake him when he reached home.

"Hello, Elias!"

"Hello, Julie! Ye been all right?"

"Yes, I been fine," his wife replied, a trace of nervousness in her voice. "Ye'll find plenty of hot water in the kitchen, an' the big tub. I've spread newspapers all over the floor fer ye to throw yer dirty clothes on. Want I should git ye somepin' to eat?"

"No," the captain grumbled. "No, I don't want nothin'. I jes' want to git to bed. I'm dead beat."

"Don't see why ye hev to go fishin' 't all at yer time of life, an' the way ye're fixed," Mrs. Bulfinch complained.

"I'll go git 'at bath," her husband said hastily, being too tired to take up his side of the family argument. Then he added in surprise: "Ye're a fixin' yer hair dif-f'rent. Be it gittin' thin on ye?"

"No, 'tain't," she answered shortly. "Don't git more'n half the water on the floor."

"How's Rose?" the captain asked, sure, this time, of having opened an acceptable subject.

"Jes' fine!" Mrs. Bulfinch glowed with pride. "'At cow gives twelve quarts of milk jes' ez regular ez regular, an' mighty nigh half of it cream."

"Ain't 'at somepin'?" The captain echoed his wife's elation. "Ain't 'at somepin'?" Wa-al, 'low I'd better be gittin' the fish scales off'n me."

Captain Bulfinch bathed luxuriously, employing all the towels that he had not used utilitarianly to mop up the water when he upset the tub. Then he went up to the bedroom. Funny there was no lamp on the bureau! He didn't need a light, though. He could find his way in the dark, and was glad to. He chuckled to himself at the thought of that mattress.

How slick the old quilt felt! Kind of like—like silk. He hadn't remembered

that the mattress sank in so much, either, and it didn't seem to bulge at the top at all. His head was too low. Reaching over, he appropriated his wife's pillow. She could get another one when she came up.

It was years since he'd slept on two pillows. Perhaps sixty-six was old to be going to the Banks; but Captain Thompson, of the New Day, was going on eighty.

How kind of queer the room smelled! Captain Bulfinch sniffed, and hazily searched his memory. Kind of like—like a funeral. Flowers? Must be flowers in there. Perhaps Angie, his daughter, was home from teaching school. She always set a heap of store by flowers. No sense in having them around when you were sleeping!

Oh, well! No watches to keep, no responsibilities of any kind, just sleep—sleep—sleep—

II

SUNLIGHT was streaming into the room. From below came the cheerful patter of quick footsteps. The appetizing odor of coffee floated up the stairs.

Captain Bulfinch made a futile effort to recapture sleep, failed, and then stretched himself in a long, luxurious yawn, blinking up at the ceiling. He sat up, opened his eyes, and prepared to yawn again. Instead, his jaw dropped loosely, while he gazed about him in wide-eyed amazement. He was in a strange room!

The wall paper that used to embower his sleeping chamber, with its wreaths of roses alternating with cornflowers and pansies, was gone. The paper that he saw was a drab gray with tiny wriggling lines of blue—like a tide rip, the captain subconsciously told himself. Gone was the big bureau with its four huge drawers and a little looking glass on top. In its place was a queer sort of thing with three tall mirrors. Captain Bulfinch saw himself distinctly in two of them, and prudishly brought his flannel nightgown together at the throat. A small table, on which was a long, slender vase holding one white lily, had replaced the washstand.

For a long moment Captain Bulfinch stared at the lily. Then he got out of bed, stepped high over the deep pile carpet that had replaced the honest rag rug his feet used to know, and looked for his clothes. Yes, there they were, his shore clothes—they had not changed.

The captain picked up his trousers, then put them down abruptly and stared at the center mirror. Something must be wrong with his eyes! He was looking at a short, fat shape which bulged heavily in the middle.

"My sakes!" Captain Bulfinch said sorrowfully. "*My sakes!*"

He hauled off the bed covering that had taken the place of the blue and green quilt, tiptoed over to the mirror, and draped it, to shut out the distasteful image. Then he went back to the chair, sat down gingerly, and began to pull on his socks.

His eyes strayed to the bed and remained fixed there, protruding at what he saw. No wonder he had been driven to two pillows! The mattress—*his* mattress, which sloped up so pleasantly at the head—was gone. He leaned forward and fingered the pink-sheathed substitute. Layers of felt stuffed with *nothing!*

"By gory!" the captain whispered, breathless at such desecration. "*My mattress! By gory!*"

"Ye'd best come an' set up afore the pancakes gits cold," his wife called up the stairs.

"I'm a comin'," he answered, hurrying into his clothes. "Yes, I'm a comin'!"

"I've made mince an' apple pie fer ye," she greeted his entrance. "Will ye hev a slice now, er start right off 'ith hearty victuals?"

"Whar's my mattress?" her husband demanded majestically, ignoring her culinary subterfuge.

"Oh, 'at ol' thing!"

"Whar's the bureau, an' the washstand, an' the wall paper, an'—an'—"

"*Will* ye set up an' eat yer victuals, Elias, er shell I clean off the table?" Julia demanded with spirit.

"I'll hev a lot to say to ye when I *hev* et," Captain Bulfinch promised sternly, and tucked his napkin in at his chin.

Hot wheat cakes light as feathers—fried ham deliciously crisp—coffee strong and black! Captain Bulfinch finally leaned back in his chair and looked at his wife with an expression which he vainly tried to make disapproving.

"What did ye share, Elias?" she inquired, deftly forestalling the question on his lips.

"Six hundred an' twelve dollars. Missed top prices, but didn't do so bad at 'at."

"No, ye done fine," Julia commented.

artfully. "Jes' fine! The cat's hed another mess of kittens."

"'At ain't news—she allus hez," her husband commented, and returned to his grievance. "What I want to know is whar's my hull room? Whar's my mat-tress, an'—an' the rest of the furniture?"

"They're gone," Julia said serenely. "I ain't aimin' to listen to no talk 'bout 'em. They're gone!"

"Gone?" the captain repeated. "Gone whar? What's come to ye, Julie? Ye ain't failin', be ye? Feel right in yer head?"

"No, I ain't failin', an' my head's ez good ez it ever wuz. Lemme ask *you* some-pin', Elias. Don't ye *never* think of what ye owe to yerself? Don't ye *never* give no thought to beauty?"

Captain Bulfinch stared at her, but she met his eyes unflinchingly.

"Ain't thar *no* time ye give a thought to beauty?" she persisted.

"Mebbe I do," the captain acknowledged cautiously. In spite of himself, the poster of a well-known and lightly clad moving picture actress swam before his eyes. "An' then 'gain mebbe I don't. But what—"

"Hev ye ever heard tell of Muriel Monroe Trotter?" Mrs. Bulfinch interrupted.

"No, I ain't. I don't keep no track of movin' picture actresses," he answered virtuously.

"Movin' picture actresses! My lan', Elias, what's come to ye? She's dean of the Women's College at Bowker University," Julia stated indignantly. "She's been givin' uplift talks fer womenkind, an' I've been to all of 'em."

"Did she uplift my mattress out of my house?" the captain queried with heavy sarcasm.

"She sez," Mrs. Bulfinch quoted sternly, "every woman hez a duty to herself an' a right to beauty an' self—self-determination. Women should git all the happiness they can out of life."

"My gosh, Julie, ain't ye happy?" the captain demanded, in real distress. "Ain't ye got *me*?"

"Sure, I got you, but I ain't makin' the most out of ye. I ain't *upliftin'* ye ez I should," Mrs. Bulfinch said earnestly. "A man's surroundin's—"

"Ye uplifted me onto two pillows las' night, hevin' uplifted my mattress out from under me," the captain broke in. His voice

tried, pathetically, to be jocular, but there was an anxious look in his eyes. "Tell me, Julie, be ye feelin' all right? Ain't yer stummick er yer head botherin' ye a leetle mite?"

"No, they ain't—not a mite," she snapped. "Lan' of Goshen, can't we never talk serious, Elias? Anyways, wisht ye'd git out of the house now an' give me a chance to redd up."

III

BEFORE heading for his favorite barber shop in Portland—to undergo the ceremony of an after-fishing-trip shave with frills—Captain Bulfinch paid a visit to Rose. That paragon among cows received his caresses with luminous-eyed appreciation, which vaguely comforted him for the abruptness of his wife's dismissal.

There certainly was something seriously wrong with Julia, the captain reflected soberly as he rode into Portland. Why should she worry about anything in the world when she had such a good husband? It was all the fault of that Muriel Monroe Trotter woman, of course—that *dean* of a woman's college! What did any woman want a college for? What was a dean, anyway?

He recalled that Julia had been all roused up when women were fighting for suffrage. He'd had to tell her the difference between Republicans and Democrats. That was a nice thing to have to do, wasn't it? Self-determination! Uplift! Beauty! Determination of *what*? Uplift of *what*? *What* kind of beauty? The captain blushed violently at the recurring vision of the poster'd movie queen.

Captain Miles Stacey, of the schooner Galloway, was in the barber shop. Captain Bulfinch sat down beside his old friend to await his turn.

"What did ye share, Miles?" he asked the customary question.

"Hundred seventy-two eighty-six," replied the skipper of the Galloway. "Sword-fish wuz scarce on George's."

"'At so," Captain Bulfinch commented politely. "Been home yit, Miles?"

"Yeah—got in las' night. Hev ye heard the news of Cap'n Rodney Mank, Elias?"

"'At ol' skinflint!" Captain Bulfinch exclaimed in disgust. "Only news I'd care to hear of him is 'at he'd lost a nickel somehow—which ain't likely."

"No, 'tain't ez bad as 'at. He jes' got married."

"He *what*? Lan' of Goshen, Miles, how in tunket did 'at ever happen?"

"Wa-al, some sez one way, some sez t'other. He's married, though," Captain Stacey detailed with gusto. "She's one of 'em square-jawed Hallets from Orr's Island. Seems 'at one of the selectmen out thar owed him a leetle mite of money, so's he got the license fer nothin', ye might say; an' Jennie Hallet's brother, Oscar, bein' 'bout his size, loaned him a hull suit of clothes to stand up in. He jes' loaned it to him, fer I seen Rodney, this mornin', lookin' like he allus does in 'em duds he heired off'n his uncle 'at died six years back."

"Ain't 'at somepin'?" Captain Bulfinch made the only possible comment. "Wa-al, I'm sorry fer 'at girl. Rodney's got more money'n a bank, but 'at ain't goin' to do her no good."

"No, it ain't goin' to do her no good," Captain Stacey agreed.

There was silence for a few moments, during which Elias's mind reverted to his own domestic troubles. He turned on his companion.

"Hev ye ever heard tell of Muriel Monroe Trotter, Miles?"

"Hev I? Say I hed," Captain Stacey acknowledged with emphasis. "So Julie's been to hear her, too! Wa-al, ain't 'at somepin'? Say, Elias, when I come home, Mirey hed a bowl of goldfish in the middle of the dinner table an' my dog shet up in the woodshed."

"What did ye do?"

"Give the goldfish to the cat, an' let Rover back in the kitchen, whar he belonged, in course. Me an' Mirey hed words this mornin'. I didn't rightly git what she wuz talkin' 'bout, but she kept sayin' somepin' 'bout determination. I told her 'at I wuz jes' ez determined ez she be, an' 'at Rover wan't goin' to catch his death of night air out in 'at woodshed."

"An' what did she say?"

"Oh, nothin' much. She hed her a bad headache, an' wuz some aillin'. I come down town to git shaved an' give her a chance to ca'm down."

"Didn't she say nothin' 'bout beauty, Miles?" Captain Bulfinch asked a trifle shamefacedly.

"Mebbe. I didn't pay no 'tention. What's a man's wife got to do 'ith beauty,

I'd like to know?" Captain Stacey demanded impatiently.

"An' 'bout upliftin' ye?"

"Next!" called the barber.

Captain Stacey rose with alacrity, and, without answering his friend's last question, sank gracefully into the red plush chair.

Captain Bulfinch decided—as he went down to Commercial Wharf after being shaved, shampooed, massaged, powdered, and scented—that his friend had dodged all important questions. Indeed, knowing Mrs. Stacey for a strong-minded woman, he doubted if Miles Stacey's account of what had happened was altogether trustworthy. Then he hastened his step at the sound of Seth Pushard's voice raised in raucous song:

"A sailor's life is the life fer me,
'Ith weevils in the bread an' louses in the tea.
A sailor's life is the life fer a fool,
So fill 'em up agin 'ith the good white mule!"

"Ye be drunk 'gain, Seth," Captain Bulfinch said sternly, looking down on the singer.

"Howdy, Cap'n Bulfinch, howdy? Drunk, ye say? Wa-al, now, I don't know. I ain't hardly hed time to git rightly drunk, what 'ith cleanin' out the vessel."

"Ye be drunk, jes' the same, an' ye'd orter be 'shamed of yourself!"

"Ye say I'm drunk," said Seth, squinting up at the speaker. "Let's see, now, be I?" He placed one foot in front of the other, and tried to follow the line of a deck plank—entirely without success. "Why, so I be, cap'n!" he acknowledged in tones of deep surprise. "Ye're a right seein' man, cap'n—so I be!"

"Hev ye cleaned her out right?" Captain Bulfinch demanded.

"Hev I cleaned her out right?" Seth repeated indignantly. "I've even scrubbed the fo'castle—though ye'd never know it 'ith all 'at scaly paint. Why don't ye paint the fo'castle, Cap'n Bulfinch? Ye be well fixed."

"I'm well fixed 'cause I don't throw money 'way on foolishness like paint," the captain retorted. "Ye go on home, now, Seth. Ye're plumb drunk. 'Low yer wife 'll give ye what fer!"

"'At's ez it should be," Seth agreed with great dignity. "'At's ez it should be. Wife's husband's best friend, I allus hold. She's a—a uplifter."

"A what? *What* did ye say?" Captain

Bulfinch roared angrily, but Pushard had serpented his way out of hearing.

IV

THERE was an excellent dinner waiting for the head of the Bulfinch family when he returned at noon. After partaking of boiled cod with egg sauce, flanked by mashed potatoes, fried chicken, sweet corn, string beans, three kinds of pickles, and half an apple pie, he moved out on the porch to enjoy a good ten-cent cigar. As soon as Julia had washed up the dishes, she came out to sit with him.

"S'pose I ought to tell ye 'bout the new furniture," she began apologetically. "It's all paid fer. I used some of the money 'at grandpa heired me to. Ye see, Elias, to be reel happy ye got to hev beauty 'bout ye. Muriel Monroe Trotter sez so."

"Mebbe ye got to hev it 'bout ye, like she sez," Captain Bulfinch admitted; "but ye don't hev to hev it *under* ye, 'cordin' to my idee. I set a heap of store by 'at ol' mattress."

"Wore out, lumpy ol' thing!" Mrs. Bulfinch said scornfully. "'At one we got now 's heap more comfy'able."

"Tain't to me," her husband maintained obstinately. "T'other jes' fitted me. I wuz used to it."

"Ef ye wuz in prison, would ye want to stay thar jes' 'cause ye wuz used to it?"

"Ain't no Bulfinch ever been in prison," her husband retorted indignantly. "We allus been law-'bidin' folks. What's come to ye, Julie?"

Mrs. Bulfinch sighed and switched to another line of attack.

"Beauty of person an' surroundin's should be en-hanced by every means in the person's power," she quoted.

"Ye mean to paint like a hussy?" the captain demanded brutally.

"No-o-o—not paint 'xactly. A leetle mite of powder, mebbe; but 'at ain't it. I mean clothes." She faced her husband with firm lips. "I mean to git me quite a heap of clothes, Elias."

"Wa-al, I can't hinder ye—it's yer own money," he said regretfully. "I *wuz* goin' to put it in 'at new vessel fer ye 'at Captain Clint Pye's buildin'—nicest, wholesomest craft I've seef fer a long time."

"I'd ruther hev clothes," Mrs. Bulfinch said firmly. She gulped three times, and added: "I'm—I'm kind of aimin' to bob my hair, too."

There was a long silence. Then Captain Bulfinch rose and walked down the steps.

"Whar ye goin', Elias?" his wife asked, gazing after him with apprehensive eyes.

"I'm goin' 'round to take a look at Rose," he said with dignity. "Mebbe 'twill uplift her."

As Captain Bulfinch rubbed the noble forehead of his well beloved cow, he pondered dismally. What in time had happened to Julia? Hadn't she everything in the world to make a woman happy—a nice home, plenty to eat, Rose, himself? And yet here she was throwing out a perfectly good mattress that just fitted a fellow, buying newfangled furniture that she didn't need—furniture chock full of looking glasses—wanting more clothes, when she had two new gingham dresses already, and planning to get her hair bobbed!

"What in tunket come to her?" he addressed Rose. Then, since she only looked at him with voiceless, limpid eyes, he answered for her: "It's jes' plumb female contrariness, 'at's what 'tis—plumb female contrariness!"

In spite of these hovering clouds of misunderstanding, the Bulfinch family went to a movie that evening, and thrilled to the adventures of a charming blond moron incessantly pursued through a wicked world by inconceivably wicked males. On the street car going home they sat close—filled with that wordless comfort in each other's presence which comes to those who have lived happily together for many years.

Reaching the little white house, Mrs. Bulfinch pleaded bread to set for the next day, and sent her husband to bed; but she did not go into the kitchen. Instead, she sat down at the foot of the stairs, her hands picking nervously at her skirt, but her lips firm set.

She waited.

For a time Captain Bulfinch whistled softly up above. Suddenly the whistling ceased. His wife braced herself.

"Julie! Julie!" came an impatient call. "Whar in tunket's my nightshirt?"

"On the head of the bed," she shot back instantly.

"What did ye say?"

"On the head of the bed."

There was a brief silence, and then:

"What in tunket does this here mean? Thar ain't no nightshirt on the bed—nothin' but a kind of Chinaman coat an' pants!"

"'At's yer sleepin' suit, Elias," Mrs. Bulfinch called firmly.

"Whar's—my—nightshirt?"

"Ef ye mean 'em ol' flannel things, I give 'em to the Salvation Army fer the heathen."

"Ye give 'em to the Salvation Army fer the heathen! Ye—but I can't sleep in this here, Julie!" the voice pleaded abjectly. "I been sleepin' in my pants fer five weeks on the vessel. Hev I got to sleep in pants fer the rest of my life to home?"

"Ye'll find 'em right comf'table, Elias."

"Julie, bring me my nightshirt—right now! *Hear me?*"

"Ye ain't got none," she called back firmly; "jes' 'at sleepin' suit—'em py-jamas. Ye'll sleep in 'em er in nothin'."

"Julia Bulfinch, 'tain't decent to suggest sich a thing!" came the captain's shocked voice.

His wife did not answer.

There followed an interval filled with wrathful rumblings from above. Then a voice, shaking with anger:

"You come right up here, Julie! How in tunket can I see to tie these here apron strings behind me?"

"Lan' sakes, he's got 'em on hind side afore!" Mrs. Bulfinch gasped, and sped up the stairs.

V

CAPTAIN BULFINCH contemplated grimly, the next morning, the high collar and resplendent necktie which had been stealthily substituted for his comfortable roll-down and dark cravat. He made no comment, however, but put them on. With a last look of resentment at the new mattress, he went down to the kitchen and performed his customary ablutions at the sink.

It was a beautiful clear Maine day. The sea along Cape Elizabeth flashed as if strewn with diamonds under the brilliant sunshine. The white sails of a swordfishing schooner changed to silver as it rounded the lightship in the offshore breeze.

While Captain Bulfinch stood idly in the doorway, the *sough, sough, sough* of steady milking came to him from the barn behind the house. It ceased, and Julia appeared, carrying a bright pail.

"More'n twelve quarts!" she announced proudly. "Thar's dinky alebins fer breakfast, Elias, all cooked an' waitin'," she added.

Breakfast was eaten in silence. When it

was over, the captain drew a cigar from his pocket, looked at it uncertainly, then put it back and lit his pipe. At last he spoke.

"I don't seem to git the rights of this upliftin', Julie," he said. "Will ye give me my bearin's?"

Mrs. Bulfinch looked at him suspiciously—his voice was too soft—then set herself for speech.

"Muriel Monroe Trotter sez we don't git 'nough beauty," she began. She paused and cleared her throat. "'Thout beauty, we can never be uplifted 'bove the sordy—sordiness of life. 'At's the main principle of the thing. Course, upliftin' is every human bein's duty."

Her eyes challenged her husband to gainsay her.

"Jes' so," he commented mildly. "Is 'at why ye got the new furniture an' 'em newfangled sleepin' pants fer me, an' give my mattress to the heathen?"

His wife nodded, and waited. The captain took several contemplative puffs. Then he spoke again.

"Ye aim to git yerself new clothes, an' powder yerself up, an'—an' git yer hair bobbed—at your age?" he demanded.

"What's the matter 'ith my age?" she bristled. "I ain't so ol' ez some! I owe it to myself to make the best of what looks hez been give me. I aim to make beauty 'round me. They're quite some of us women hez made up our minds to make beauty 'bout us, to spread happiness—"

"So's 'at's why ye tuck my mattress?"

She ignored the interruption.

"To spread happiness," she repeated. "Thar's Esther Jane Wyman, an' Mirey Stacey—she give the captain his choice atwixt galluses an' a belt—said he couldn't hev both—an'—"

"Kind of noticed in the barber shop 'at his pants needed a reef tuck in 'em," her husband interjected, but Mrs. Bulfinch swept on.

"An' thar's Meli Pease, an' Eva Pushard. We're goin' to make folks happy by makin' beauty 'bout 'em. Muriel Monroe Trotter sez 'at every critter on earth must hev beauty to be uplifted, an' uplift is the duty of every critter. She sez—"

"Then why did ye take my mattress? Never mind 'at, though. Ain't no use talkin' 'bout it, ef the heathen hez it. Try an' make happiness 'bout ye! Yeah, I see!" He rose, snorting helplessly. "Wa-al, 'low I'll go down town fer a spell."

"Lan', I'm glad ye understand!" his wife breathed thankfully. "Mirey Stacey's hevin' a turrible time 'ith Miles since she won't let his dog lick off the plates no more. Ef ye're goin' down town, Elias, I bought a cane suited to yer age. Ye'll find it back of the settin' room door. Jes' ez well to git used to sackin' it 'ith ye. It's—it's suited to yer age."

"What?" roared Captain Bulfinch wrathfully. "What's suited to my age? Ye'll be gittin' me crutches next. Suited to my age!" Then he restrained himself with a mighty effort. "Wa-al, I'll look at it when I come back."

Mrs. Bulfinch glowed with triumph as she went about her household tasks, but, nevertheless, a vague feeling of distrust lurked in the back of her mind. It had been too easy. Elias Bulfinch had always been an obstinate man, and he *had* set a heap of store by that old mattress. She swept and reswept the heavy pile carpet, made the bed, and polished the mirrors and woodwork till they shone.

The footsteps of her husband sounded below. Her thoughts tock another turn. Possibly Elias would carry the cane—with a head that you couldn't tell from gold—to the movies that evening. He seemed—"Julie! Julie! Whar in tunket's the big scrub brush?" a voice carried up to her.

"Fer the lan's sakes, what do ye want of 'at, Elias?" she called back.

"To scrub 'ith. Did ye think mebbe I wanted to brush my hair?" came the impatient reply.

"Under the sink," she directed, her attention diverted by a speck of dust on a chair rung. "Now I wonder what Elias wants 'ith 'at!" she murmured to herself as she bent down to the offending spot.

"Moo! Moo-o-o! Moo-o-o-o!" came in accents of startled protest from the barn.

Mrs. Bulfinch went down the stairs, out into the yard, and around to the barn, as if with one movement.

"Elias!" she shouted. "Elias, what's come to Rose? What's—great lan' of Goshen! Hev ye gone clar out of yer head?"

Captain Bulfinch looked up mildly from where he knelt by the cow's side, and suspended operations with the scrubbing brush.

"I'm makin' Rose happy by makin' her beautifuler. I aim to scrub her good."

"You're *what*?"

"I'm makin' her happy—upliftin' her, ye might say."

"Let 'at cow be!" commanded Julia. "She won't give three quarts of milk ef ye fool 'round 'ith her! Come right into the house, Elias, an' leave her be!"

"Nope—goin' to uplift her. 'Low I'll make her look reel nice." He applied the scrubbing brush with vigor. "I'm thinkin' some of gittin' her some lay-lac scent, too."

"Ye'll ruint 'at brush! Anyways, Rose don't like it."

"She's got to like it," Captain Bulfinch said stubbornly, ceasing labor to gaze up at his wife. "Now I don't like bobbed hair, er to hev my mattress tuck 'way 'at fitted me so good, er sleepin' in a Chinaman's pants. I 'low Rose *hez* to be happy when I git her all prettied up. Yeah, she *hez* to be!"

"Oh!" Mrs. Bulfinch spoke in a different tone—one acidly sweet. "Oh, I see! Wa-al, Elias, scrub her real good, an' then go down town an' git me a new brush. Be back in time fer supper."

She turned swiftly, and went into the house. The captain stared after her, then scratched his head dubiously. Rose jerked back impatiently from the scratch of the brush.

"Wa-al, 'low I'm in fer it," he soliloquized. "It's right hot, too. Move over, you," he addressed Rose sternly, "so's I can get at t'other side of ye. Might ez well finish what I started."

Cows have their dignity, however, especially such pampered cows as Rose. She did *not* move over. On the contrary, she remained exactly where she was, and, lifting one protesting leg, propelled the elderly seaman out through the door, where he lay, desperately fighting for breath.

"An' I meant well by ye!" he finally said in accents of deep reproach, and returned slowly to the house.

VI

THE sun was setting, and supper was on the table, when Captain Bulfinch returned from Portland, that evening, with a new scrubbing brush in one of his capacious pockets. The meal was eaten in stony silence. Afterward Mrs. Bulfinch dressed for the movies, and came out into the kitchen, where her husband sat brooding.

"Whar's yer new cane?" she asked stiffly.

"I ain't goin' to sack 'long no cane nowhere," the captain stated positively.

"Yes, ye *are*," his wife retorted, her lips straight set. "'Low ef ye can take all 'at trouble to please a cow, ye can carry a cane to please me. You go git it!"

The captain went.

Captain Bulfinch had to go down to the ship chandler's, in the morning, to order supplies for his next trip. As he got off the car in Portland, he glanced carefully up and down the street. Somehow there was a distinct feeling of distaste in his mind at the thought of meeting any of his usual cronies, even though he had seen Captain Miles Stacey carrying a cane at the moving pictures the night before.

Whom should he see bearing down on him but his pet aversion, Captain Rodney Mank? Elias made as if to pass with a curt nod, but the other man stood in his way.

"Ain't ye goin' to wish me well now 'at I'm married?" he asked, rakishly hitching up his disreputable trousers.

"In course I be," Captain Bulfinch said unwillingly. "I wish ye well. I wish yer wife well, too," he added significantly.

"I'm 'bliged to ye," Captain Mank answered, in tones which showed unmistakably that he got the point. He cast about for a suitable rejoinder. The brilliance of his interlocutor's cravat gave it to him. "Seems to me ye're all dressed up like a fish buyer's widder, Elias. Ye don't care how ye spend yer money, do ye?"

"I ain't so tarnation careful of a nickel ez some," Elias stated darkly.

"No, I hear ye ain't," Captain Mank retorted. "Hear Julie hez the house full of newfangled fixin's."

"I didn't buy 'em," Captain Bulfinch growled.

"Wa-al, some men can control thar wives, others can't," Captain Mank expounded with relish. "Now *my* wife knows she can hev everythin' better 'n everybody else ef she wants to. 'At satisfies her, ez it should, an' it ain't costin' me a mite more to live 'n it did afore I married, ef so much."

"Ye don't say!"

"No, not a mite," the miser continued with relish. "I heared ye're sackin' a cane 'long, Elias. Are ye thinkin' of gittin' one of 'em gold braid caps? I mean is Julie goin' to *make* ye git one?"

"Ye mind yer mouth, Rodney, er ye're liable to git it slapped!" Captain Bulfinch roared. "What is it to ye ef I do sack 'long a cane?"

"Oh, nothin'. Good day to ye!"

Captain Mank gave a hitch to the other side of his trousers and rolled up the street. Wrath in his heart, Captain Bulfinch stared after his aversion. Then he turned into the ship chandler's—and came face to face with Captain Stacey.

"Hello, Miles!" he greeted hastily, so that the other man could not speak first. "When be ye sailin' again?"

"Goin' up the bay to ice when the tide turns at noon," Stacey answered shortly. "Should be on George's to-morrow night."

With difficulty Captain Bulfinch refrained from voicing the sentiment that his friend was lucky—he didn't sail for three days.

"How's Mirey?" he substituted.

"Mirey?" Captain Stacey glanced at his friend with deep suspicion. "Mirey's all right. Why shouldn't she be? She wuz a leetle mite aillin', but Jennie Hallet—'at's Missus Mank now, ye know—come in. Ain't the kind of girl ye might think 'at ol' skinflint would hev married, ef ye ask me. She's—she's kind of young an' flighty, to my way of thinkin'."

"Hez she got her hair bobbed?" Captain Bulfinch asked, and instantly regretted his words.

"Hez she got her hair bobbed?" Miles repeated in amazement. "No, she ain't. Want to know anythin' else?"

Captain Bulfinch didn't, but he felt called upon to say something. The words came to his lips automatically:

"Good-lookin'?"

"Wa-al, I swan to goodness!" Captain Stacey exclaimed in shocked tones. He examined his fellow fisherman with scandalized eyes. "I swan to goodness! Good-lookin'! An' at yer age! No wonder ye hev to lean on a cane to walk, ef 'at's the kind of life ye been leadin'!"

"You mind yer mouth, Miles Stacey!" the older man said furiously. "I don't hev to lean on no cane, like some I seen at the movies las' night. I—I flourishes it."

"Ye flourish 'round some of these here young married women so's Julie hears 'bout it, an' ye'll quit flourishin' fer good," Captain Stacey retorted. "I sack 'long 'at cane 'cause I've a mind to. Ain't nobody *made* me do it."

He glared defiantly at his friend—but only for a moment. Then his eyes dropped.

"I'll—I'll sack 'long two canes ef I've a mind to," Captain Bulfinch boasted, but his voice lacked conviction.

The two old fishermen stared at each other, and each plainly read the other's thoughts. It was Captain Stacey who broke the silence.

"'Low we're both ez ye might say in the same dory, Elias," he said.

"Yeah, 'low we be." Captain Bulfinch nodded sadly. "Ain't thar nothin' we can do 'bout it, Miles? 'At ol' sculpin, Rodney Mank, stopped me on the street an' threw Julie's new furniture into my face—an' my new necktie."

"Huh! Ain't no chance of *his* wife gittin' no new furniture," Captain Stacey snorted; "ner of him gittin' a new necktie—less'n he takes one out of some cod 'at's swallowed it."

"Yeah, 'low 'at's so," his friend agreed. "Still an' all, it don't ez ye might say help us none. Ain't thar *nothin'* we can do 'bout it?" He paused, then added desperately: "Somepin's *got* to be did!"

"Wa-al now, ye see"—Captain Stacey cleared his throat—"ye see, it's this way, Elias. Mirey's kind of aillin'. She allus kind of gits headaches when things ain't goin' jes' to suit her, an'—wa-al, I'll be on George's to-morrer."

"Ye'll be on George's!" Captain Bulfinch repeated reproachfully. "I don't sail fer three days! Ye can't go back on an ol' friend 'at way, Miles. Three days! Why, thar ain't no tellin' what 'll happen to me in three days! Ye got to think of somepin', Miles—ain't no other way! Ye allus used to be a quick thinker. Go on, now, an' think of somepin'!"

"Wa-al, mebbe I can," Captain Stacey conceded, flattered by this tribute to his brain power. "Mebbe I can. Ye git yer business done, Elias, an' I'll ride out on the street car 'ith ye. Seems like I can't think less'n I'm on somepin' 'at's movin'."

Captain Bulfinch put in his order for stores, and the two fishermen went out and clambered on board a trolley for Cape Elizabeth. Once settled in his seat, Captain Stacey gave himself unreservedly to thought, his brows knitted in a prodigious frown. Captain Bulfinch fidgeted in his seat, stealing stealthy glances at his companion, but forbore to break the spell until they neared their destination.

"Hev ye got it, Miles?" he inquired hopefully.

Captain Stacey glared at him.

"Why in tunket did ye hev to speak jes' then?" he demanded wrathfully. "I wuz jes' gittin' somepin'! It wuz risin' pretty, like 'twuz takin' the bait, an' ye hed to scare it by talkin'! Ye don't deserve to hev nobody think fer ye, Elias!"

"Lan' of Goshen, ain't 'at somepin'?" the unhappy Bulfinch wailed. "Can't ye hook it again, Miles? See can't ye hook it again!"

"I'll try, but I ain't promisin' nothin'."

The conductor pulled the bell rope.

"Come on an' git off 'ith me, Miles," the old fisherman pleaded. "I got a jug of hard cider to home. I've heard tell 'at cider's good fer brain work. Mebbe a swig 'll fetch it back to yer mind."

"Tain't likely," Captain Stacey said dejectedly, but followed his friend.

VII

IN silence the two captains clumped their way up to the little white house and into the kitchen. Captain Bulfinch opened his mouth to speak, then closed it and froze into immobility as a voice carried to him from the half open door of the sitting room.

"Ye can't be happy, Jennie, less'n ye hev beauty 'round ye. Muriel Monroe Trotter sez ye can't, an' she knows."

"'At's Mirey in yan," Captain Stacey whispered. "Now, what in tunket—"

"Shet up, can't ye?" Captain Bulfinch admonished, and leaned forward to listen to another voice.

"But ye got to spend money to hev beauty—ain't no two ways 'bout it; an' Rod ain't one to spend money, no matter *what*. When we wuz married, he tol' me he wuz well fixed an' I could hev anythin' I wanted, but it 'd be better fer me ef I wuzn't to want nothin'."

"Jennie Mank!" Captain Stacey whispered, and then was silent under his companion's glare.

"'At woman ain't livin' 'at don't want nothin'." Julia Bulfinch's voice held deep conviction. "The sooner Rod Mank finds it out, the better it 'll be fer ye, Jennie."

"Lan' sakes!" Mrs. Rodney Mank laughed to hide the wistfulness in her voice. "I s'pose, ef I wuz to say I wuz goin' to git me some new duds, er buy new fixin's fer the house, Rod 'd hev a stroke!"

"Let him," Julia counseled earnestly.

"Anyways, ye don't hev to say ye're goin' to git 'em. Jes' go an' do it—at's what I done."

"It all bills down to this," broke in the fervent voice of Mrs. Stacey: "are ye a goin' to fetch up yer husband like he oughter be fetched up, er are ye a goin' to leave him be an' neglect yer plain duty? Ye owe it to Rod to uplift him—at's yer duty. The lan' knows thar ain't nobody 'at needs upliftin' wuss'n what he does!"

"Yeah, guess he does," the bride agreed meekly.

"Thar ain't no upliftin' can be done 'ith-out beauty," Julia took up the refrain; "an' ye can't hev beauty less'n ye hev new duds an' house fixin's."

"Wa-al, I dunno," Jennie Mank said dubiously. "Ef I go an' spend his money 'ataway, couldn't he hev the law on me er somepin'?"

"No, ma'am!" Mirey Stacey laughed scornfully. "Thar ain't no law 'gin wedded wives. Ye're Rod's wife, an' ez sich he's got to pay for what ye buy."

"I do hanker to hev some new things," Mrs. Mank said, and sighed.

"Sure ye do!" There was encouragement in Julia's voice. "'At woman wa'n't never born 'at didn't! An' more'n 'at, ye got to hev 'em. Ye owe it to Rod. Ye got to git new things an' then keep on gittin' more, fer beauty ain't in hevin' what ye need so much ez it's in gittin' more'n ye need—so's ye'll hev beauty," she ended triumphantly.

"I'd like some things fer Rod, too." The bride's voice was as one who sees visions. "He looked real han'some in my brother Oscar's suit he stood up in to git married. I'd like fer to git him a blue suit 'ith brass buttons I could keep shined up, an'"—she faced the other women with starry eyes—"an' a cap 'ith gol' braid an' 'captain' writ on it!"

Miles Stacey delightedly prodded his friend in the ribs, but Elias Bulfinch was beyond feeling.

"Fer any sakes!" he gasped in an awed whisper. "Rodney Mank dressed up in a cap 'ith gol' braid!"

"'At 'll look fine—jes' fine!" Mrs. Bulfinch's voice commended warmly. "Dunno ez I'd fancy one fer Elias, but seems to me it 'll be some han'some on Captain Mank."

Captain Bulfinch shot a triumphant glance at his companion, who ignored it

and leaned forward, frowningly intent, as his own wife spoke.

"I been hevin' some sich thought 'bout a fancy cap fer Miles," Mrs. Stacey said; "but I guess mebbe it 'd be more fittin' ef Jennie here gits one fer her man, her bein' a bride an' all. Yeah, guess it 'd be more fittin'."

With profound relief Captain Stacey let out his pent-up breath.

"It's nice of ye both to feel 'ataway, an' it makes me more sot on the cap 'n ever," Jennie Mank admitted; "but I guess 'tain't no use talkin' 'bout it. Ef I wuz to buy all 'em things, Rod 'd take on so I jes' couldn't stand it."

"Wa-al, fer any sakes!" Mrs. Stacey gasped. "You don't hev to lissen to him takin' on. Git ailin'!"

"Git what?" Mrs. Mank demanded.

"Git ailin'! D'ye mean to set thar, Jennie Mank, an' tell me ye dunno what brings a man 'round? It's a wonder to me ye don't know *natchrel*! Git ailin'—it 'll fetch him when nothin' else won't."

"Wa-al, I—" Captain Stacey began wrathfully, and then was suddenly silent.

"But ef he should argufy," Jennie insisted, "what 'd I do? Mebbe he'll argufy, no matter what."

"Git ailin'!" Mrs. Stacey repeated solemnly. "Git ailin', an' keep ailin' till he stops! He'll larn, after a while—ain't no man so stupid but what he'll larn."

In the silence which followed Mrs. Stacey's *credo* the two old captains gazed at each other long and earnestly. Then the voice of Jennie Mank, vibrant with purpose, broke on their ears:

"I'll do it! I'll hev beauty! I'll buy me a new red hat an' a plush sofy an' a victrola, an' hev the house painted, an' git Rod a blue suit 'ith brass buttons an' a cap 'ith gol' braid, an'—"

Very softly Captain Bulfinch stole to the half open door of the sitting room. Softly, very softly, he closed it. Then he crossed to a cupboard, opened it, and brought forth a jug, from which he filled two brimming glasses and handed one to his friend.

With a beatific grin, Captain Stacey lifted his glass and spoke:

"To Muriel Monroe Trotter!"

"To beauty!" fervently responded Captain Bulfinch.

There followed the pleasant gurgle of good hard cider flowing down two leathery throats.

Who Is Sylvia?

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL—THE STORY OF A STRANGE
MASQUERADE

By Gertrude Pahlow

Author of "The Gilded Chrysalis," "The Cross of Heart's Desire," etc.

ANNE SCHUYLER stood—straight and strong and wholesome, with her clear eyes and fresh out-of-doors look—near the door of her big drawing-room, frowning anxiously down the length of it. To the casual beholder the scene was highly pleasing—bright with chrysanthemums and autumn leaves, animated with hand-picked youths and maidens in festal garb, vibrant with cheerful chatter; but to Anne's impatient eye it was an emptiness and a suspense, an animation without a meaning. It was a welcome-home for Sylvia the well beloved, and Sylvia was not there.

A debonair, auburn youth, with a careful white carnation in his buttonhole, intercepted her glance and came to her side.

"What have you done with her, Anne?" he demanded. "Here I am all dressed up like a fatted calf to make her home-coming perfect, and she shows a vacuum! Are they holding her for duty?"

"I'm completely stumped myself, Jerry," confessed Anne in a worried undertone. "I missed her at the pier, because they held the ship four hours at Quarantine and then docked while I was getting lunch; but I left the car, with a message that if she landed before I got back she was to come straight here. And what do you think? Richards gave her the message, and then she had him drive her to the Waldorf!"

"That's a rum go! Did you call her up?" inquired Jerry.

"Yes, and she said she was seedy and wanted to rest. Of course I told her to come and rest here, but she wouldn't. At the same time, she wouldn't let me call off you people. She said she'd adore a party, and would be here in good season; and, Jerry, I sent the car for her two hours ago!"

"By jingo, that is rum! Perhaps she's shining up. Girls do put in that long with the brass polish, don't they?"

"Not Sylvia. Dear old thing, for all she's so beautiful, she never cared a sou how she looked."

"True for you! I remember how she used to go around in a smock and a far-away look, like the *Blessed Damsel*. A trifle too rarefied for my simple tastes, she was. What do you think's holding her, then?"

"I think," said Anne, in a low, troubled voice, "that she dreads to face us."

"Dreads to face us! Why in thunder should she?"

"Oh, Jerry, she's been through so much, she must have suffered so horribly—I suppose the poor kid feels as if she hadn't any skin! When I think what five years of that mother of hers must have done to her, and her marriage to that awful Russian on top of it, I wonder there's enough left of her to come home. And when I think she may be shivering down there in a hotel bedroom, afraid to meet her friends—well, five minutes more, and I'll go for her myself!"

As if her uneasiness were contagious, a tall, lean, clean young man who stood near her turned to echo it.

"Is anything wrong, Anne?" he asked. "Why doesn't Sylvia come?"

"Yes, where is Sylvia?" demanded some one else.

At that a hubbub of inquiry broke out:

"Where's Sylvia? Anne, where in the world is Sylvia?"

All at once, as if the outburst of audible impatience had been an electric signal, there was a step on the threshold, the portières

parted, and some one stood in the doorway—exquisite, brilliant, dazzling. It was exactly like a scene in a carefully rehearsed play—the well set stage, the company registering suspense, the star's entrance at the climactic moment. Everybody turned, and there was an instant of startled silence.

The star seized upon it with consummate aptness.

"Where is Sylvia? *La voici!*" she said.

The silence burst in an explosion of eager welcome.

"Sylvia! Why, Sylvia *darling!* How perfectly wonderful to see you again!"

"Jove, Sylvia, you're looking great!"

"What did you mean, you bad child, by keeping us waiting so long?"

"Oh, Sylvia, *dearest*, I'm so glad to get you back!"

The last exclamation was Anne's, made with a little choke that told more than words, for Anne was one who habitually kept her heart in the left side of her chest, and not on her sleeve. She had held back at first while the others seethed around, but neither her reserve nor her hostess's courtesy was a match for her emotion, and now she darted forward with a rush to hug the dazzling vision.

When the embrace was over, Anne, the calmly practical, drew back, wet-eyed and misty; and the vision stood there, brilliant, triumphant, and completely mistress of the situation.

"Charming people," she exclaimed, with the beautiful crisp enunciation of the adept linguist, "what a home-coming! Ah, how many times have I thought of this when I was in a far country, filling my what-you-do-not-mention-in-polite society with husks! Fain would I fill it now with you, my dears! I could eat you all, to the last button; but I will refrain—I must think of your posterities."

There was a burst of laughter, as if the star had said something exquisitely witty. Indeed, so vivid, so scintillant was the whole effect of her that everything she said sparkled like wit. She was certainly very beautiful, her eyes dark and brilliant, her hair a rich chestnut, her coloring and figure exquisite. There was about every detail of her a finish, a sophistication, that showed her something far more perfected than a mere masterpiece of nature. A babble of enthusiastic conversation began to seethe around her. She had become the inevitable center of animation, as if she were the

source of some magical radioactivity. Those who could not get close enough to talk to her clung to the outskirts and talked about her. Somebody, crowded out of the immediate precincts, went to the piano and began to play "Who Is Sylvia?" Somebody else began to sing it. The scene had attained the proportions of an ovation.

Anne, in her self-abnegating capacity of hostess, ensconced herself at the tea table behind unbreached ramparts of sandwiches and cake; and here she was joined by Keith Ludlow, the tall, lean, clean young man. He put a friendly hand on the back of her chair, but stood gazing at Sylvia. His eyes, deep-set under dark eyebrows, were warmly and somehow surprisingly blue.

Anne gave him her quick, comradely smile.

"It's glorious to have our Sylvia again, isn't it?" she said.

"Yes," he answered slowly. "It's glorious, if true; but *have* we got her? She's left some of herself behind, or brought some more along—I don't know which."

"She is changed," admitted Anne; "but how could she help it, after all she's gone through? I think it's marvelous of her to come out so bright and beautiful."

"She was always beautiful," said Keith discontentedly, "but not so bright—not so doggoned bright as this. That entrance, you know—waiting around in the hall till the psychological moment, and then flashing on us like a chewing gum ad.—that's not like Sylvia."

"Oh, that was just accident," replied Anne quickly. "Any moment would have been as psychological as that, when we were all in such a hurry to see her. Her looks, and her awfully nifty way of talking, and her simply rapturous clothes—we've just got more Sylvia, Keith, and we ought to be thankful for it."

"I'd rather put some of it in cold storage," said Keith, "and get the old amount back again. Listen to that, Anne."

Sylvia was talking. Expanding in the intoxicating warmth of her welcome, she talked all the time, but with such magnetic vivacity and charm that she gave no effect of garrulity. Speaking with that complete absence of accent which to American ears constitutes an accent in itself, using her eyebrows and shoulders and jeweled hands, she was describing her voyage.

"Ill? But, *mes amis*, that is not the word for it! It was earthquakes, cataclysms, convulsions of nature. Figure to yourselves, I was so sick as a cat that I almost did not care how I looked! Almost—but before I fell quite over that last most desperate brink a kind hand drew me back. One day I said, 'All is over,' and groaned a hollow groan—a deathly groan, a groan of farewell to the world. It brought to me the captain—a charming man, French and sympathetic, who made me his special care. He was passing, and, my door being ajar, he came in. 'What, *madame*, you groan?' said he. 'Ah, captain—I die!' said I. 'Well, then, you make all the blessed saints and angels die too—of jealousy,' said he. 'Oh, then I shall not have died in vain,' said I; 'and at least I shall have the satisfaction of going to heaven in my best *peignoir*.' 'You look so like an angel already in your best *peignoir*,' said he, 'that I do not see why you trouble to go to heaven. Besides, you have a quality which I feel would be wasted there.' So, perceiving that he spoke the truth, suddenly I opened my eyes, powdered my nose, and recovered; and the voyage ended quite deliciously, after all."

Keith looked significantly at Anne.

"How's that?" he said. "Is that the same girl that went away?"

Anne avoided his eyes. Her own were profoundly disconcerted.

"Come, everybody!" she called, by way of diversion. "Here's a board groaning with company food and hurt feelings!"

"Oh, come on!" responded Jerry. "Rally round the nourishment, and eat a health to Sylvia!"

Sylvia came, and then they all came, like a hive of bees swarming after the queen. Even in competition with the festal food Sylvia was supreme, and, though she herself showed a brisk appreciation of it, it did not interfere with her conversation in the least. She was one of the few women whose attraction is increased by the indulgence of an appetite. Something deliciously natural and animal showed in the bitings of her white teeth, lending piquancy to her sophistication.

It would have been evident to a glass eye that Jerry Thorne was completely captivated. He hovered over the newcomer, plying her with food, hanging impaled on her pointed words; and presently he began trying to abstract her from the group by

subtle lures of cozy corners and comfortable chairs. Failing in these veiled attempts, he came out boldly into the open.

"Sylvia," he said, "you're exhausted by a long and perilous journey. Moreover, you're at a poignant moment of your history—the exile's return, the immigrant's lament, and all that. You need solitude—that is, mitigated solitude. Sylvia, come with me!"

"Now, Jerry, no highwayman stuff here! Jerry, come to! Kidnaping's a criminal offense!" the protests began.

But Sylvia raised a mischievous glance, responsive to him.

"Far be it from the poor alien to defy a lord of the land," she said. "Lead me, lord—I follow!"

Jerry beamed with triumph.

"Years of foreign residence have not corrupted your judgment, Sylvia," he chortled. "This way out, please!"

Kissing her fingers to the discomfited group, she followed him in her slender, sinuous fashion out of the room and down the hall. With a solicitous hand on her elbow, Jerry conducted her to a small, secluded boudoir at the rear of the house. This had always been a favorite sitting-out place at the dances of their early youth, and he looked to see it awaken tender memories in Sylvia; but she only glanced about unsentimentally at the decoration.

"Very chic," she commented. "New?"

"Yes; Anne had the whole plant renovated after the old girl checked out. Do you remember how it looked in the old days, Sylvia, when we used to recede here during the light fantastic brawls?"

Piling up the sofa cushions with a practiced hand, Jerry sank down beside her and fixed her with a tenderly reminiscent gaze. She looked back at him from the corners of her dark eyes.

"Did I ever recede here with you?" she inquired.

Taken aback, Jerry told the truth.

"Well, no, Sylvia. You were too high-minded in those days for twosing with poor me."

"Then," she answered demurely, "I do not remember it."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Jerry appreciatively. "That was a pippin! For perfect repartee you have Shakespeare and the Bible and Bartlett's 'Familiar Quotations' knocked cold! Why have you stayed away so long?"

"Well, if you wish to know, *mon ami*," said Sylvia, accepting a cigarette and settling down for a confidential chat, "it was because I could not stick her whom you aptly call the old girl. It was *triste* in Europe, yet, but not so *triste* as a home with the lamented Addie, mother of Anne. How she could talk! Grievances and genealogy, separately and mingled, dull and blameless, like a medicinal sulphur spring!"

"Couldn't she? It is more jovial here since she had the hunch to move on to eternity."

"And that is the only realm that can do justice to her anecdotes. I see Anne is still in half mourning for her, but I am quite sure that nobody's vitals—not even Anne's—mourn at all. Anne is not pretty. Has she many admirers?"

"Oh, everybody likes Anne! Tell me, Sylvia, what have you been doing all these years, while we languished for you?"

She looked at him again from the corners of her eyes.

"Has Anne told you nothing?"

"Nothing much—only that you married a Russian, and that you've been living with your mother."

Sylvia gave a quick nod.

"That is undoubtedly because there is nothing more to tell. A daughter—a widow—a poor unfortunate child of fortune—my history has been short, you see."

"But you look as if it had been meaty. You've come out enormously since you went away, Sylvia. Sketch a few of the high spots for me, won't you?"

She blew a little cloud of smoke.

"You see, I do not know your taste in high spots—whether it is spiritual, dramatic, or pungent. It is true that my life has not been altogether without events; but the first rule of social success is never to recount the wrong kind."

"Then I'll take 'em pungent, please. Something tells me you've had a good many moments of hitting on all six."

Twisting among the cushions so that she faced him, she dropped her brilliant, mischievous eyes full on his.

"We begin, then, O prince, with the four hundred and seventy-fifth adventure—'The Adventure of the Poor Widow and the Unscrupulous Potentate.' You must know that a certain widow, obscure, alone—"

"No husband, I suppose?"

"No, none to speak of—had the misfortune to attract the notice of a very impor-

tant personage. This personage had a country house, to which he invited the widow for a house party. She went unsuspecting; but when she arrived she found that the other guests had not appeared.

"I am desolated, *madame*," said the potentate, 'but the count and countess have a sick aunt, the baron has smallpox, the *chevalier* and his wife have been caught in a railway wreck, and the dowager has broken her leg; so for you and me it will be a *solitude à deux*.'

"I am even more desolated than you, *m'sieu*," said the poor widow, 'but by an odd coincidence I have a sick aunt, smallpox, a railway wreck, and a broken leg of my own; and so for you it will be a *solitude seule*, and for me good day!'

"So, bribing one of the servants, she managed to get to the railway in a farm truck—for the automobile of the illustrious host was included in the debacle. She arrived as a lady of the great world, and departed as a load of hay."

"By Jove, Sylvia!" exclaimed Jerry.

"But the next week—" resumed the historian, with a small twinkle in her experienced eye.

"Sylvia!" interrupted Anne's voice, from the hall. "They're beginning to leave us. You'll have to come and speak to them before they go."

"Oh, heck!" lamented Jerry. "Just as it was getting interesting! Will you finish it when they're out of the way?"

Her eyes laughed at him.

"The other cardinal rule of social success is, never finish it! *Scheherazade* was not the only lady wise enough to know that. I am coming, Anne!"

They all pressed around Sylvia as she reappeared in the drawing-room, eager to renew their welcome, to tighten the old bonds, to make plans for the future; and she met them with the sparkling charm of her first entry augmented by success. She had the gift of the practiced actress and the finished hostess—that of making herself multiplex enough to suffice any group. Giving a bit here and a bit there, she made each one feel himself the chief recipient. So she dismissed them one after another, with smiles and promises and bits of intimate talk, until no one was left but Keith Ludlow and Jerry.

Keith, seizing a moment when Anne was talking to Jerry near the door, got the guest of honor to himself.

"Sylvia," he said, leaning over her eagerly, "do you remember the day you went away? Do you remember what I said to you, and what you answered?"

She met his hungry gaze with a look that was cool, reserved, and dominating.

"I remember nothing," she answered distinctly.

"Sylvia! Not that day on the ship? Not—"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing. Understand, my friend, my amnesia is complete. From to-day we shall have to start fresh, without memories."

Keith's deep-set blue eyes looked reproach and longing at her, but she met them unyieldingly; and before he could speak again the others had joined them.

"Anne says we have to go home, Sylvia," complained Jerry. "She says you're tired; and I've been around enough myself to know that you can't stay much longer when everybody else has gone. But I'm going to bury myself like the ground hog until you shine again. Shine soon, Sylvia!"

"As soon as you dig yourself up, *mon ami*. *Au revoir!*"

"*Au revoir!*" echoed the two men—Jerry with joy, Keith somberly—and the portières fell behind their departing figures.

As soon as they had gone, Sylvia turned to her hostess. A change had come over her, as swift as the dropping of a curtain, as the blowing out of a candle. All her animation was gone, and she was suddenly large-eyed and pathetic.

"I must beg your indulgence, dear cousin," she said in an exhausted voice. "I have been through so much, this happiness is so great, I can bear no more!"

Anne was at her guest's side in an instant, her face warm with loving anxiety.

"Sylvia, darling!" she exclaimed. "We've tired you out. What a rotten shame!"

"It is nothing," said Sylvia, with a brave smile; "but—old friends, old memories—*chérie*, I must be alone for a little. You will forgive?"

"Forgive, nothing! This is your home, Sylvia. It's yours just exactly as much as it is mine, and you're to do just exactly what you feel like doing in it. I'll show you your rooms, and then everybody'll keep off you."

Arm in arm they ascended, by means of a lift as smooth-running as middle-aged love, to the third floor; and here Anne led

her returned wanderer to the choicest spot her hospitality could offer.

"Now rest," she said, her boyish voice deep with tenderness. "Sylvia, dear old girl, I know something about what you're feeling, from the way I'm feeling myself; but you can't *possibly* know how glad—how all lit up with gladness—I am to get you home!"

Sylvia answered with the mute gesture of one too near tears to risk speech. Then, blowing a pathetic little kiss, she closed the door. Inside, she locked it and leaned against it.

"My God, she will be a heavy weight!" she murmured. But as her glance roved down the long, luxurious vista—rosy-cushioned boudoir, rosy-curtained bedroom, white and silver bath—it brightened perceptibly. "Well, it is worth the trouble," she added. "Sylvia, *ma mie*, you begin well!"

II

"How's the world wagging, Jerry?" asked Anne, pouring tea.

"Dull and slow, dull and slow," sighed Jerry, stretching out his legs. "Vale of tears—working for your living in the sweat of your brow—deuced long time between drinks—born to trouble like a spark plug, and all the rest of the stuff the Psalmist sings. By Jove, those early Christians knew life! If it weren't for you, Anne, I'd be stimulating the daisies by now."

"Apple sauce! You're the gayest butterfly out of captivity. I'll bet you've found three new charmers since the day before yesterday. Did you take the beautiful deb to the show?"

"What beautiful deb? Oh, you mean the poor little Perkins sausage! I've forgotten her. She was only a strong man's passing whim. Anne, where's Sylvia?"

"Dressing. She'll be down soon. Isn't she stunning?"

"You uttered it. Now *there's* a girl to write home about! She's the highest yodel of the Alps. She has all living competitors embalmed and planted. If you really want to know, Anne, why I don't warm up as usual over the other dames, it's because I don't know they exist. I'm mashed to a prostrate pulp by Sylvia."

"She *is* wonderful," agreed Anne heartily; "much more wonderful than she was when she went away. Then she was only lovely and dear, now she's brilliant. It's

staggering, what she's packed into five years. She makes me feel like an infant, and really I'm a year older than she is."

"She'd make Cleopatra look like a sucking pig. Tell me about her, Anne. I've sort of forgotten her beginnings. What started her off to Europe in the first place?"

"Why, she went—poor kid!—to protect her mother."

"Oh, yes—her mother! Begin with *her*. Ratty old buzzard, wasn't she?"

"Well—if you think that's a polished way to refer to my uncle's wife. Anyway, she's been so many other people's wives since that I suppose it doesn't matter. Yes, she *was*—erratic. She didn't like Uncle John, and when Sylvia was five she ran away with his secretary. Uncle unhitched her, and she married a Frenchman. Then there was an Italian; and then the next we heard she was an Austrian countess. Then the war came, and the count lost his money; and then she began writing to Sylvia."

"I know. We had a cat like that once."

"Jerry, you're disgusting."

"All ladies of that sort are sisters under the skin. But what did Sylvia want with such a damaged dame? She used to be more in the stained-glass line herself."

"Oh, she was simply *obsessed* with pity. She knew how dull it used to be at uncle's; and she'd look at her dear Sylvia's picture—Aunt Sylvia never would let herself be called 'mother'—and see how beautiful she was, how like herself, and she would think how the dear creature had been misunderstood and repressed and driven to desperation. And then there was a long time when she didn't hear anything, and believed that the poor angel had died a martyr's death. So, finally, when she began getting sobby letters from Austria, there was no holding her. Uncle was dead by that time, and she took every cent she could lay her hands on, and rushed off."

"Some female Quixote! But why did she tie up to the Russian bird? I suppose Russians are God's creatures, too, but I must say they're caviar to me."

"I never knew; but I imagine he was blackmailing her precious mother, or something like that, and she took him as part of the self-sacrifice program. I know she was wretched with him—her letters at that time were so queer, so guarded. Poor darling, she's been through everything! After

he died she went back to her Sylvia. Then, for a long time, I didn't hear anything, didn't even know where she was. And when she did finally write, last winter, she wrote in a way that made me feel she was desperate."

"Asking for money?" suggested Jerry shrewdly.

"Y-yes. Of course I knew she'd been through tortures before she came to it. Since then I've been writing to her regularly, begging her to come home."

"Sending her money regularly, too, I'll bet a tin shoe horn! Well, now you've got her, and a good job, too. Where's she going to hang out, when she gets settled?"

"Why, here, of course! Do you think Sylvia will ever have to hunt for a home while I have a perfectly good one?"

"H-m! You may find her a little—different, Anne, after this long time."

"All the more reason," said Anne stoutly, "why I should show her that I love her exactly the same."

Jerry reached over and clasped her hand.

"You're a peach, Anne!" he said warmly.

Anne's color suddenly deepened, and a lovely light flashed into her gray eyes.

"I'm not, but I like to hear you say so," she answered in a lower tone; and if Jerry Thorne had looked at her then, he would have seen something worth seeing.

But Jerry's eyes were all for the door, where there was a movement of curtains.

"She's coming!" he said alertly. "As Tennyson says, 'She is coming, my whosis, my what's-its-name, she is—' Oh, heck!" he added disgustedly. "It's only old Keith."

Keith Ludlow crossed the threshold of the room with long-legged strides, his sober face warming into the smile that made it lovable.

"Hello, Anne!" he said. "Hello, Jerry! Where's Sylvia?"

Anne laughed.

"You don't take so decently long about it as Jerry did. She's dressing. You'll have to put up with me, straight, for a few minutes. We were just talking about her, Keith—about what a wonder she is. I told Jerry I never saw anybody who had squeezed so much into five years."

"What's she been doing, Anne—traveling?" asked Keith, lowering his long person into a chair and accepting tea.

"Traveling a little, and living a heap.

She doesn't talk about Russia at all—because she was miserable there, I suppose; but she seems to know Italy and France by heart, and she's spent a good deal of time in Vienna. That was her mother's headquarters."

"I think her mother's been a deuced bad influence for her," said Keith somberly. "Of course, she couldn't be anything else. Sylvia's a different girl from what she was when she went away."

"She's a darned sight more interesting," observed Jerry. "The time was—I say it with all respect—when a *tête-à-tête* with Sylvia would put me to sleep; but now—oh, boy!"

"Don't you feel the change in her, Anne?" asked Keith. "You used to know her better than anybody. Do you feel as if you knew her now?"

Anne fidgeted with the teacups, avoiding his eyes.

"Of course, Keith, she's been away from me so long that we have to make a fresh start. I expected that. Just give us time," she added with an odd effect of pleading.

Keith opened his lips to reply, and then closed them again. There was a pause. Everybody felt the questionable taste of discussing a person whose arrival was imminent; yet Sylvia so absorbed the general attention that no one could think up another subject cogent enough to drive her out. Anne tried to fill the breach with little cakes.

And then, just as the silence began to grow awkward, there came a step outside the door, a rustle of soft raiment, a stir of perfumed air, and Sylvia was in the room. Before she spoke, even before any one turned, they all knew that she had come. It was like that with Sylvia, nowadays. She disturbed the air as if heralds went before her with trumpets.

The men jumped to their feet, Anne turned from the tea table with half uneasy relief, and instantly the whole atmosphere of the room was changed—stirred, electrified, charged with intoxicants and delicate explosives.

"Good day, my dears!" said Sylvia gaily. "Behold what a miracle I perform for you—I appear within fifteen minutes of being summoned! Indeed, I come down half dressed; but then many callers prefer that." She laughed at Keith, let her fingers linger caressingly in Jerry's, and sank into a becomingly high-backed chair. "Anne,

my own—but tea? Is there no such thing as a cocktail within the precincts?"

Anne rang the bell. She was too healthy to approve of afternoon stimulants, but too good a hostess to say so.

"Will you have one?" she asked the men perfunctorily. "Yes for Jerry, no for Keith? Two cocktails, Johnson, please."

Sylvia tossed a bright, provocative glance at Ludlow.

"So abstemious!" she mocked. "A reformer, perhaps? But with one or two stiff drinks within the belt you would find the world so much improved that you would not need to reform it!"

"There's something in that, Keith," averred Jerry. "Reform's very much like religion—it's a state of mind. Reform yourself, and you'll live in a reformatory."

"I'm not a reformer," said Keith stiffly. "I'm only temperate."

"Ah, like the good Bryan!" commented Sylvia. "But that is so uncharitable to the grape. It is the same fruit, fermented or unfermented, and, like ourselves, it must be so much happier when lit. What, they are here so soon? The excellent Johnson is a boy scout, always prepared. Brighter days!"

She looked over the rim of her glass at Keith, and tossed off the contents more expertly than the idiom.

Jerry reproached her.

"We two revelers should revel together, and let the teetotalers weep into their tea. Just to punish you, I won't drink your health; and if I don't, nobody will, for a health drunk in tea is the equivalent of a black eye."

"Oh, my poor friend, I did not mean to neglect you!" exclaimed Sylvia. "Come, I will drink another to our friendship. Hours as nimble as your tongue, pleasure as keen as your wit! Pour, Johnson! Drink, M'sieu' Jerree!"

Ludlow watched her with fascinated eyes full of unhappiness. It was obvious that he was deeply in love with her—too deeply for detachment or for tact. He could not take her as she was, and he could not leave her alone.

"Since when have you taken to cocktails at tea time, Sylvia?" he asked. "You didn't use to take them even at dinner."

"But, my dear, I could not go on to the grave with the nursing bottle as my only refreshment! I have grown up since I went from you. I have lived in many

places and drunk many drinks—oh, many!”

“It has changed you,” commented Keith moodily.

“But it has not made me fat!” said Sylvia triumphantly, drawing her fingers down her slender sides with a gesture that was like a caress. “I can drink what I please and eat what I please, and the blessed, the beloved scales say not one word of forbidding to me.”

“Who is Sylvia, what is she-e, that eats nor drinks distend her?” caroled Jerry, who, abstemious by habit, was already feeling cheered. “You’re made of rubber, Sylvia, contractable but not expansible. Or no—you’re made of spirit; food and wine feed your flame and sparkle from your mouth in electric-lighted words, but have no weight with you.”

“No, no, I am made of meat,” returned Sylvia seriously. “I do not deny the pleasant flesh, I love it; only I prefer it within bounds. You have heard of the small but cruel *sous-vêtement* belt that is called Aphrodite’s Girdle? I have one of those. Nightly, clad in it and my native innocence, I stand before the confessional of the mirror; and the very first time that I see a ridge—but the *tiniest* ridge—above or below it, butter and I are forever strangers.”

Anne blinked. Not only was she a trifle old-fashioned, but this was Sylvia the erstwhile wood violet. She turned awkwardly to Ludlow.

“Have some tea, Keith?” she asked.

“Thank you, Anne,” returned Keith, passing his cup. “Did you see that Dan Thursby has a drawing in this week’s *Life*?”

“Oh, Lizzie! Aren’t the clouds lovely to-day!” chortled Jerry.

Sylvia made a gay little face at him.

“Did you go to Sunday school last Sunday, *m’sieu*?” she asked mockingly.

“No, but I’ll go to Sunday school, or to the devil, or anywhere you say, Sunday or Monday or any other day, if you’ll go with me!”

“*Ou, là, là!* He grows friendly, this charming Jerree! Be careful, *mon cher*—one of these dull days I may take you at your word.”

“You can’t do it too soon. The Rendezvous languishes for you, Henri’s grows dull for lack of your luster. Come with me, Sylvia, and we’ll paint this drab hamlet a

beautiful, brilliant vermillion. Have you ever been to Greenwich Village, where the hair grows short and the nights grow long?”

“No, but I have been to the village of Montmartre—so like heaven, because there is no marrying or giving in marriage there. I adore village life! I will go villaging with you soon, Jerree.”

“Why, Sylvia, you’ve been to Greenwich Village,” protested Anne. “A lot of us went there one night before you left New York, when the fad was at its height. You were there, Keith. You remember, don’t you?”

“I do,” said Keith, “and I remember Sylvia didn’t like it. We went to a silly would-be tough place, and she got me to take her home early. How different you were then, Sylvia!”

To save his life he could not leave it alone.

“How different, and how dull!” bubbled Sylvia. “I will not remember those days of my dullness; and you too, Keith—you should forget them. You should go down on your knees and thank the *bon Dieu* that in His mercy He has seen fit to brighten me up a little!”

She laughed into Jerry’s merry eyes, and he kissed his fingers to the laugh. He and Sylvia seemed to be withdrawing from sober Keith and steady-going Anne into a gay and raffish world of their own. They were obviously exhilarated, not only by the cocktails, but by each other.

“You loosed a larynxful!” he declared. “God did a good job when He made you, and a better one when He improved you!” And bursting into song again, he improvised: “Then to Sylvia let us si-ing, that Sylvia is a pippin. She was as nice as anything, but now she’s simply rippin’!”

Sylvia, caught up on the wave of Jerry’s exuberance, joined him in a bright, light soprano.

“To her garlands of le-e-ettuce bri-ing!” she sang, and together they chorused: “To—her—garlands—”

They had just reached the high note when Anne’s eye was caught by a movement on the threshold. A young man stood there, evidently just arrived, a good deal taken aback by the hilarity of the atmosphere, and in two minds whether to advance or to withdraw. He was a spruce, conventional young man, the typical well-to-do New Yorker in appearance, but distinguished by the slight oddity of eyebrows

that met in a continuous black line over a Roman nose, giving him a hawkish and predatory appearance wholly at variance with a naturally mild disposition.

Anne hastened to greet him, showing a warmth that was not devoid of relief.

"How d'you do, Mr. Cunningham?" she exclaimed. "I'm awfully glad to see you! Do come over by the fire and have some tea."

There was a little bustle. The singers stopped their vocal exercise, Keith and Jerry came forward to greet the newcomer, and Sylvia turned toward him, flushed and laughing. Anne, going back to the tea table, introduced the two strangers to each other:

"Sylvia, you don't know Mr. Cunningham, do you? Mr. Cunningham, my cousin, Mme. Orloff."

At this point the new young man and Sylvia, acknowledging the introduction simultaneously after the somewhat foolish fashion of introducees, made answer respectively:

"No, I haven't the pleasure. How-do-do, Mme. Olaf?"

"*Mon. Dieu*, it is Abner Cunningham! But how glad I am to see you, Abner!"

The effect of this combined pronouncement was marked. Sylvia's clear voice, with its crisp enunciation, easily overrode the young man's mumble; but at the same time his aspect of complete blankness smacked her such a startling buffet that he seemed the dominating figure in the encounter. Sylvia looked like an expectant eater who has opened her mouth for a bite and finds that there is nothing to masticate. Anne, Keith, and Jerry glanced from one to the other in bewildered amazement.

"But how brutal of you to disown me, Abner!" exclaimed Sylvia. "I have danced with you so many times!"

"Why, Sylvia, how could you have?" protested Anne. "None of us knew him until last winter. When you were here, he was living in California."

"And I thought," added Keith, addressing the young man, "that your name was Charles."

Mr. Cunningham was so much embarrassed that his peculiar eyebrows looked like a black bridge across a fiery sea.

"I was—it is," he stammered. "Abner Cunningham is my father. He moved West for his health twenty years ago. He's there now; but," the youth added anxious-

ly, as if desirous of doing all he could to oblige a lady, "I'm said to look very much like him."

Jerry burst into a shout of laughter. Considerably exalted himself, he evidently attributed the oddly divergent views of the two introducees to Sylvia's cocktails.

"Won't he do, then, Sylvia?" he crowed. "Maybe he'll let you call him Abner, to make you feel at home. You're a fast worker, Sylvia! I've heard girls call men by their first names after an hour or so, but to call 'em by their father's first name at first sight is a new one on me. Gets you right in with the ancestors. Fresh, but clubby."

"But how queer!" protested Anne. "Mr. Cunningham's father left here when you were in kindergarten, and yet you—" Looking at her cousin, she broke off abruptly. The color had fled completely from Sylvia's face, leaving the delicate patch of rouge on each cheek detached and forlorn, with a curiously ghastly effect. "Why, Sylvia!" she exclaimed.

Jerry, less observant, burred on.

"Danced with him, too! Did he dance you on his knee, or did you dance on the top of his head? Something mysterious here, Cunningham! I think it's compromising. Did your dad snatch 'em from the baptismal font? Or do you try to gloss your affairs with respectability by impersonating him?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Mr. Cunningham. The mildest of young men, he was acutely distressed by the turn affairs had taken. He looked about with an uneasy eye, and, apparently concluding that he had strayed into a den of inebriety, turned hastily toward the door. "Good day! Goo-good-by! I must be going," he mumbled.

"Don't, Cunningham," said Keith quickly, putting a hand on the young man's shoulder. Turning to Sylvia, he fixed her with a look at once accusing and pleading. "Sylvia, nobody understands your joke. I think you'd better either drop it or explain it."

"Oh, I will explain it!" said Sylvia quickly. The color came flooding back into her face, drowning the rouge and making her more beautiful than ever. "It is very simple, I find. Now I see it all. When I was little—very little—my father brought Mr. Cunningham's father to our house for dinner. I heard them talking, and the name 'Abner,' which my father said many

times, struck my childish ear. I had forgotten it; but last night I dreamed of dancing with a man who looked exactly like this Mr. Cunningham, and of calling him Abner, and the dream was so vivid that now, for a moment, I thought it was true. It shows — does it not? — how enduring are childish memories!"

"No—it shows you have a complex," chuckled Jerry. "The Freudians'll get you, if you don't watch out. Charles, she has what they call a Cunningham neurosis, or maybe an Aberration."

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Mr. Cunningham, and again he glanced at the door.

But they were all upon him with hospitable attentions. Anne plied him with sandwiches and tea; Keith, exuberant with relief, pressed him into a chair; Jerry urged a cigarette into his limp hand.

He looked doubtfully at Sylvia, still suspecting her of trying to be funny at his expense; but his suspicions vanished when he saw her leaning limply back in her chair, dabbing tiny points of perspiration from her forehead with a handkerchief that shook a trifle. Evidently she suffered even greater embarrassment from her mistake than he did; and he succumbed to the friendly overtures, and relaxed in his chair.

At the same time his eyes, having once rested on Sylvia's face with attention, remained riveted to it.

"I say, Mme. Olaf," he remarked eagerly, "you were singing. I wish you'd do it again, you know. I'm awfully fond of music."

"Oh, do sing, Sylvia!" urged Keith. "It's a joy to hear your voice again. And yet," he added, "it seems—strange."

"I was going to speak of that, too," said Anne. "Sylvia, your voice has changed since you went away. It's brighter, higher."

Sylvia started a little. She could not have been so accustomed to afternoon cocktails as she pretended, for she was evidently jumpy.

"That's old age," she explained, lightly but rather breathlessly. "As the statistics go up, so does the voice."

"I thought it was the other way," said Jerry dreamily. He was reacting from his mirth into a state of mellow peace. "I thought that as life went on the voice, like the poor human creature, fell lower and lower and lower, until it reached the ultimate depths. It was that way with me. In youth my mounting carol knocked at

the gates of heaven. Now, in maturity, it goes down, down, to depths that I dislike even to mention in the presence of ladies."

"But sing, anyway, Sylvia," pressed Keith. "Sing the songs you used to sing in the old days."

"My dear Keith, I cannot," protested Sylvia.

"I cannot sing the old songs now," murmured Jerry. "It is not that I deem them low; 'tis that I can't remember how they go!"

Sylvia flung a swift glance at him.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

"Quoting, my dear—merely quoting; but at that I'll bet a yeast cake it's true. You can't remember 'em, can you? I couldn't sing a song even one year old, let alone five."

"Oh, *mon ami*, you are right!" confessed Sylvia, with a spontaneous burst of charming laughter. "I have forgotten them, along with much, very much, of those innocent days which *ce cher* Keith so regrets; and I do not know any new ones. I cannot sing to you, Keith."

Keith relapsed into gloom.

"Then I must go," he said. "Thank you, Anne. Good-by, Cunningham. Good-by, Jerry." He paused by the door, with hungry eyes on Sylvia. "Sylvia, I wonder if you could show me where Johnson put my coat!"

Smiling a little at the transparent ruse, Sylvia rose and led the way into the hall. Here she stood demurely still, her slender figure in its crimson frock effectively outlined against the biscuit-colored portières, while Keith towered above her yearningly. Her face was a blank. Only her eyes mocked a little.

"Sylvia," he said in a slightly husky voice, "you told me you'd forgotten everything we ever said to each other; but you haven't forgotten how we used to dance together, have you—how perfectly our steps matched? Sylvia, the Bachelors' dance comes next week, on Saturday. Will you go with me?"

Sylvia's blankness intensified during the first part of this speech, as if she were blotting the past all the more completely out of existence; but at the conclusion it melted into reflectiveness, and then she sparkled into acquiescence.

"To dance with you and the other bachelors!" she said. "But that will be charming. Yes, my friend, I will go gladly."

"Sylvia, you're an angel!" muttered Keith. Seizing her hand, he crushed it to his lips. "That makes up for a lot, Sylvia—darling!"

Sylvia returned to the drawing-room with her smile a little intensified, and found it met by a broad grin on the face of Jerry. He, too, was on his feet, evidently delaying his departure only until her return.

"Well, so long, Anne, old dear," he said.

"By-by, Cunningham! Sylvia—er—would you mind helping me find my galoshes? I left 'em here last winter, thinking the butler might like 'em for wine coolers."

Sylvia, laughing, went back to the hall. The door was just closing behind Keith, and she moved so that she stood against it.

"That's the girl!" said Jerry approvingly. "Quick in the uptake, you are. Two's company at crucial moments, eh? Well, not to keep you in suspense, Sylvia, I want to inquire if you'll go with me to the Bachelors' hell-raising on Saturday week."

"Oh, Jerree!" exclaimed Sylvia, with sincere regret. "I have just promised Keith! Why did not you ask me sooner?"

"Curses! Who'd have thought old Keith would be so enterprising?" complained Jerry bitterly. "I thought he was only proposing to you. You've blighted my life, Sylvia. You've stunted my growth."

"I will give you lots of dances, Jerree. Do not forget to ask for them!"

"You watch me, Sylvia! I'll be after you like a tin can after a dog."

"*Au 'voir*, then, Jerree—until a week from Saturday."

"Until nothing like that, fair dame! Until day after to-morrow, if I can get somebody to lock me into a padded cell that long."

Sylvia kissed her fingers to him with a laugh, and returned once more to the drawing-room. Here she found Anne making rather heavy weather of it with her remaining guest. Mr. Cunningham was *distracted* and uneasy, crumbling his cake, giving disjointed answers, and keeping one eye on the door. Evidently he had been badly shaken. At sight of Sylvia, he brightened visibly.

"Are you staying here long, Mme. Olaf?" he inquired.

"As long as my kind cousin can stand me, Mr. Cunningham. I am a waif and stray."

"She's here for life, if I can keep her,"

interposed Anne. "She really belongs here, you know. She's just Sylvia Schuyler a little Europeanized."

"I'm glad to hear that you're going to stay," said Mr. Cunningham, with obvious sincerity. "I'm very glad. I—er—I hope to see something of you."

"As much as you please, Mr. Cunningham, within the limits of convention. Evening dress allows a good deal."

Sylvia's eyes had regained their naughty twinkle. Ribaldry, however, was wasted on Charles, son of Abner.

"I shouldn't overstep," he assured her. "But I wonder—er—I was wondering—er—if you would care to go to the Bachelors' dance on Saturday of next week."

"Oh, how kind you are!" exclaimed Sylvia. "I am so sorry—I have already promised Mr. Ludlow!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Cunningham, on a crest-fallen downward note.

"But I hope you will ask me to dance," added Sylvia quickly. "I want to dance with you. I even dreamed about it, you know!"

"Oh, I say, that's deuced good of you!" ejaculated Mr. Cunningham, with ardor. "I—er—I say, it's *confounded* good of you!"

"Don't forget, then," smiled Sylvia.

"I shan't! I shan't!" promised Mr. Cunningham earnestly. "And now I think I must leave you. I—I must be going. I really have to go."

Bowing politely over Anne's hand, squeezing Sylvia's, and pausing at the door to send back an ardent gaze from under his black eyebrows, the enslaved youth took his departure.

Anne smiled humorously at her cousin. Her clear eyes were very observant.

"Well!" she said. "You've had a busy tea party, Sylvia."

"Productive, too," answered Sylvia thoughtfully. "Anne, my dear, I am very glad I came back."

III

THE Bachelors' Club was an exclusive, select-few affair, and its dances were like itself—no concern of *hoi polloi*. They were not held in a public ballroom, but in the secluded precincts of the apartment that was the club's headquarters. They did not conduct themselves in an ostentatious mass in the midst of critical observers, but strung along demurely through a series of

rooms, which allowed scope for several sorts of social activity besides dancing; and no lady except one in great demand elsewhere was ever bidden to them. They were therefore extremely popular, in the higher and less philological sense of the word, and nothing but elopement or sudden death could induce a girl to pass one by.

Sylvia and Anne, Keith Ludlow and Jerry Thorne, entering late—for Sylvia was too well aware of her value, nowadays, not to keep her entourage waiting—found the festivities in full swing. They paused on the threshold of the first room, and at once, though every one was busy with the main business of the evening, an electric undercurrent flashed through the place. News was passed from mouth to mouth, heads turned, subdued comment buzzed.

Sylvia, standing up-stage in the center, charitably gave them their money's worth. She was dazzling to-night, in a vivid cerise frock, picked out with jet, which made her look like a tropical butterfly. She laughed and chatted vivaciously, swaying a great fan of cerise feathers, and holding her head, with its flashing comb, with a poise that was both regal and piquant.

Anne, by contrast, looked very subdued. She was never beautiful, and her clean, healthy boyishness was drab beside such arresting splendor. She wore black, which did not suit her, but which she had self-sacrificingly put on because the violet of her first intention would have insulted the brilliant hue of her guest. The fact that she came on Jerry's invitation caused her no elation, for she knew perfectly well that she was second choice.

Keith, too, looked something less than ecstatic. His pride and satisfaction in bringing Sylvia were drowned in troubled bewilderment at the discovery that her cheeks and lips had blossomed into the color of her gown and her eyelashes into the jet of her garniture, and that she seemed more than ever a gorgeous stranger.

Jerry, however, was on the crest of the wave. Sylvia could not be too vivid for him. Even if he had not brought her, he was in her company, and by enterprise and audacity he had succeeded in appropriating nearly half the dances on her card.

"Who is it?" ran the murmurs.

"Why, haven't you heard? It's Sylvia Schuyler."

"Not Sylvia Schuyler! Why, she used to be—"

"Yes, I know; but she married a foreigner, and she's lived a *very* gay life abroad, I hear."

"She's not so beautiful as she was."

"No, but a hundred times more amusing. You can see she's enormously brightened up; and she says the most appalling things!"

"Oh, crazy about her; and so's Jerry, and so's Dick Spence, and so's Charlie Cunningham, and so are a dozen more. Oh, yes, and so am I—simply batty!"

Sylvia, evidently deciding that she had given the audience a long enough stationary view, suddenly slipped into Keith's arms and out upon the floor. Covertly or overtly, every eye in the room followed her. The two made a striking couple, he with his sober distinction and she with her vividness, and they danced together to perfection, as Keith had said.

Sylvia moved like the spirit of limelight, fully aware of her dominating quality, poised and challenging. Poor Keith, on the other hand, went in visible chains. To the dullest eye his slavery was patent. Oblivious of every one else, he yearned over her—not happy, yet enthralled.

"I was right, Sylvia, wasn't I?" he murmured beseechingly.

"About what, *mon ami*?" asked Sylvia, looking up at him.

Her eyes needed no penciling to make them brilliant. This atmosphere of concentrated attention, criticism, admiration, warmed and lighted her like cocktails.

"About our steps matching. We dance together well, don't we?"

"Deliciously! You dance like the angels in heaven, Keith—or like the archangels, or the apostles, or whoever are the best dancers in the best heavenly set. I am glad I came with you."

"Sylvia! Truly?"

"Truly! I tell you frankly, my dear, I came with forebodings, not at all sure we should be sympathetic; but we dance like one person."

"We always did. And yet your way of dancing has changed, too, like the rest of you."

"Whose has not, in five years? What did we dance five years ago—the minuet? Oh, Mr. Cunningham, I am glad to see you!"

Charles Cunningham, who was passing, stopped, dropping his partner as if she had something contagious.

"Are you really? Are you really?" he exclaimed, his eyes gleaming beneath his one black eyebrow. "You won't forget you're going to dance with me, will you?"

"I shall not forget," answered Sylvia, "that my dream is going to come true!"

She smiled bewitchingly over her shoulder as she passed on, and Cunningham, obviously paralyzed, had to be tweaked by his partner before he could resume his responsibilities.

"Why do you do that, Sylvia?" asked Keith unhappily.

"Do what?" said Sylvia, returning, across the room, the ardent greeting of another new admirer.

"Send that poor chap off his head about you, when you don't care a penny about him."

"My dear reformer," said Sylvia impatiently, "I do not know whether you are a *réchauffé* Savonarola or a Carrie Nation, but you are certainly tiresome! I trust I am permitted to make a civil remark to a friend without being raided by the police."

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Sylvia. Civility's one thing; enslavement's another. I ought to know," Keith added bitterly.

Sylvia looked up at him, mollified.

"Why do you say that?"

"Why do you ask foolish questions? You know perfectly well that I've never been able to see any girl but you; and you know that ever since you came back you've kept me in hell!"

"Oh, my poor Keith, I am so sorry! That is a locality with which you have nothing in common. What can I do to get you out?"

"Oh, Sylvia, sweetheart, you know! Chuck all this sophisticated stuff, and be the dear straightforward girl you used to be! Speak the truth to me—and let me speak it to you!"

Sylvia raised her beautiful eyes again, and nestled a little closer.

"What kind of truth?" she asked softly.

Poor Keith! Not publicity nor principalities nor powers could stay him now. He bent his head lower.

"The only truth that matters," he murmured in her ear. "The truth of our love. I love you, Sylvia! Before you went away you loved me. Don't say you've forgotten, Sylvia; remember again. If you had stayed, you'd have married me—I know you would. Sweetheart, you've come back

home; come back to me, too! Marry me now, Sylvia!"

"What? Instantly?" laughed Sylvia. "May we finish this dance? I thank you, dear man, but before I speak I must think. I will answer you—some day."

"Soon, Sylvia—soon!" begged Keith. "You've kept me waiting so long!"

"The longer they hang, the better they ripen," riposted Sylvia.

She softened her mockery by a caressing pat on his arm and a momentary brushing of her perfumed hair against his cheek; and his arm tightened about her so convulsively that she almost squeaked.

Now the end of the dance had come, and with it the eager Jerry. Sylvia detached herself gladly from her too intense lover, and greeted the newcomer with a welcoming smile.

"Jerree, you shine like the morning sun!" she said gayly. "I saw your bright face gleaming everywhere through the fog of soberness."

"And you shine like the quintessence of radium," returned Jerry, beaming. "I could see you through a vest pocket, or a steel armor plate, or seven veils, or anything. Shall we join the free-for-all, fair shiner?"

"By all means! I long to dance with you, Jerree; but let us move to the next room," said Sylvia, impelled partly by an altruistic desire to spread her light over a wider field, partly by a slight feeling of discomfort under Keith's deep eyes.

As they crossed the threshold, the buzz of comment, admiration, and criticism rose anew to greet them, and Sylvia nestled, flushed and smiling, into her partner's arms. Jerry did not dance so well as Keith. He had not the same inherent sense of rhythm, or the same strong steadiness in guiding; but he threw into all his activities a zest and gayety that more than made up for any shortcoming.

Sylvia's enjoyment increased. She began to dance with more abandon, a gypsy sparkle lighted in her eyes, and suddenly she gave a little laugh of pure pleasure.

"This is living, Jerree!" she said. "Music—lights—dancing with a person who knows that dancing is a joy, and not a funeral march! I would rather dance with you than with any one, Jerree."

"Oh, you say that only as the Florence Nightingale of the ballroom. You know you'd rather dance with Keith."

"No, no! Keith is a jailer to me, you set me free."

Jerry glowed at this tribute. "And you, Sylvia," he returned handsomely, "you transport me to heaven, and make me feel like a cherub who's had four drinks and got his halo on crooked!"

Sylvia laughed ecstatically.

"Oh, my Jerree, you are adorable! I love your charming silly tongue! We understand each other, do we not?"

"We'd make the Siamese Twins look like total strangers. When I think, Sylvia, that five years ago I used to run away from you, when I might have been having this"—he gave her a shameless little hug—"I wonder what kept me out of the loonery."

"Oh, let us not talk of those days! I blush to think how dismal I must have been—like a nun, like that *triste* mistress of Louis Quatorze whom some one said he had for a penance. Thank God, that is past! Now tell me, dear Jerree, if you could have whatever you most desired, what should you choose?"

"To dance with you," said Jerry promptly.

She moved with a little appreciative snuggle that left a smudge of powder on his coat.

"But we cannot dance always. We go on legs, not wings, and we must rest our shoes. What then?"

"To play with you, Sylvia—to hold your delicious hand, to listen to your delicious conversation, so unlike my revered grandmother's; to—"

"But you cannot play always, Jerree darling. That would be work. I mean, if you could have whatever you wanted, if you had five million francs to do what you pleased with—it is what I always think of when my spirit is happy like this—what would you want most?"

Jerry thought for a moment, then answered with a sort of surprise. "By gravy," he said, "I'd want you, Sylvia! That's the gospel—the gas bill—truth! If I had a million dollars, there isn't a thing I'd want to buy with it but you!"

"Oh, you sweet Jerree!" cooed Sylvia. "I thought you would buy, like me, castles in Spain and motors in Nice and yachts in the Mediterranean. What makes you such a bad investor?"

His arms tightened around her again.

"Gosh, Sylvia, I believe I'm in love with you!" he said. "I *am* in love with you,

Sylvia! I'm pie-eyed about you! Marry me, will you? Marry me quick, Sylvia! Will you?"

She laughed softly, provocatively, into his ear, at the same time snuggling closer. A deft and experienced touch had Sylvia.

"Now do you r-r-really think I am old enough to marry?" she teased him. "And do you think you can support me in the style to which I am accustomed? There is much to consider, Jerree. There must be *pourparlers* and conferences and what you call powwows. *Chi va sano va piano.*"

"I'll piano you if you play on me, you lovely devil! Say yes! Say yes, and we'll run away and do it quick! Let's do it tomorrow, Sylvia! Life is short."

"Life is short, but marriage is long," retorted Sylvia. "At least, it is long in this State. It has to last a whole year, I think. I cannot answer such a solemn question like eating an olive, darling Jerree. I must dream on it."

"Then dream yes. Pretend you're dreaming on wedding cake. We'll have cake, and an old shoe, and a preacher, and all the agony, if you say so—if only we have a bride. *Dream yes, Sylvia!*" he added, whispering hotly into her ear.

Laughing again, Sylvia pressed her cheek swiftly and briefly against his, and slipped out of his arms. One of her chief social assets was that she knew exactly when enough was enough. The quickness of her going surprised and disconcerted him so much that for an instant he stood motionless; and in that instant she was gone. By the time he had recovered himself enough to hurry after her, she was safe in the doorway of the women's dressing room, blowing him a mocking kiss over her shoulder as she dropped the curtain behind her.

Secure in this hallowed feminine retreat, which, so early in the evening, was empty, Sylvia looked into the mirror with sparkling eyes of satisfaction.

"Two in twenty minutes! Not so bad, my Sylvia! You have not lost your knack—no, not at all. Nothing like a bit of practice to get one in the vein! Now, let us see—little Cunningham next. My poor little Cunningham, it is the slaughter of the innocents!"

She added a haze of powder to her smooth skin—having left most of her former equipment with her impassioned partners—and touched her bright lips to new vividness.

"Little Cunningham, *nous voici!*—supposed speech of General Pershing," she murmured.

Then, hearing that the music of the next dance had begun, she went back beyond the curtain again.

Her next partner was charging agitatedly through the dancing rooms in search of her, and she could not repress a smile at the comicality of the sudden change from desperation to rapture in his beady black eyes.

"The beads are stuck with a needle, and then the needle is withdrawn!" she thought.

However, she was far too clever to let the smile reach the air in the guise of amusement. By an artful lowering of her eyelids and an upward glance through the dark lashes she transmitted it into shy delight; and the ingenuous Charles reached her side in a helplessly deliquescent state which almost moved her to pity.

"Oh, here you are, Mme. Olaf!" he gasped. "I thought I'd lost you!"

"How could you think that?" asked Sylvia, with her eyelashes. "Did you think I could—forget?"

"I didn't know—I—I was afraid—I—I didn't dare to be sure—because you—you're so—you're so—so—" yammered the infatuated youth.

"I am so—glad I am going to dance with you," Sylvia took it up, "that I went and powdered my nose again, to make sure of being worthy. Dear Mr. Cunningham, I wonder if you would mind sitting out a little while? I am tired after a frightfully busy day, and I should so enjoy a talk with you."

"Oh, Mme. Olaf!" gasped poor young Charles. "Would you? Would you really? I'd like it better than anything—anything in the world!"

"Find us a nice quiet place, then," murmured Sylvia, "where no one will bother us."

Realizing, as she made the suggestion, that he was in no condition for practical usefulness, she cast her own experienced eye about. At the end of the corridor there was a door half opened on a room too small for dancing and too dim for cards. This being only the third or fourth dance, it would probably be unoccupied, and of course whoever secured it first would possess it exclusively.

She laid a light, magnetic touch upon Cunningham's arm.

"I see where you are going to take me—

to that cozy little room down there. How clever of you! It is the very place."

The dazed and ecstatic Charles managed, with a little shoving, to stray into the designated spot, and Sylvia, unostentatiously closing the door behind them, engineered him into a sofa corner.

The room, as she had conjectured, was consecrated to *tête-à-têtes*. It was small and intimate, with drawn curtains and one shaded lamp. The dance music, mitigated by distance, filtered in seductively. She leaned back among the cushions and looked at him from under languorous eyelids.

"Ah, this is bliss!" she sighed. "To sit in a quiet spot, out of the tumult, with an old friend—but I forget, you are not really an old friend. It is only my own foolish feeling that I have known you for a long, long time that makes me think so."

"Oh, I wish it was true!" exclaimed the helpless swain. "I wish we really were old friends! When I see these chaps like Thorne and Ludlow, who've always known you, and can call you S-Sylvia, I feel—I feel—I just can't tell you how I feel, Mme. Olaf!"

"Ah, do not feel it! Let us be old friends, then—strangers no more! The name of Orloff, I hate it. I bore it in misery and anguish, and when I hear myself called by it I die a thousand deaths. Call me Sylvia, and let me call you Charles—my friend!"

"Oh, *would* you?" cried Charles, plunging through the line of sofa cushions and tackling her hand. "If you would, I—I—I can't tell you how happy I'd be! And if you'll let me call you Sylvia—oh, Sylvia!"

She did not repudiate the caress; but she loosened her slender fingers from his clutch, and laid them with a light, dominating touch over his. She had him quite sufficiently subjugated, and too much emotion always bored her.

"Why should we not be old friends?" she returned, on a cooler note. "Our families were friends for many years. Your father, I remember him from childhood. Tell me of your father, Charles. Is he well, and active? Is he very like you?"

The youth, completely conquered, controlled his ardor with an effort.

"Yes, he's well, if he lives in California. He has asthma something fierce in New York. No, he isn't very much like me, except we look alike. He's more—more—well, I suppose he's more of a hustler. He

doesn't hustle, exactly, but he's more—or he's less—"

"I know—more incisive, more ruthless, less sensitive and sympathetic than you. It is so I remember him. How much better I understand your nature than his! Yet I should like to see your father again, Charles. Has he broken all connections with New York?"

"Oh, no—he keeps his membership in his law firm. His partner looks after the practice, but he comes twice a year to see to things he's specially interested in. He's due in a week or two now."

"In a week or two?" exclaimed Sylvia, sitting up eagerly. "Oh, that is splendid! You must bring him to see me, Charles. Promise me you will bring him as soon as he arrives."

"Seems to me," remarked Charles, a trifle sulkily, "you're more keen about seeing my old man than you are about seeing me. You don't make *me* promise to come soon!"

"Silly! I make you promise to *bring* him, do I not?"

"Well, but you don't ask me to come first, and you've asked twice as many questions about him as you have about me."

"Oh, Charles, you *are* a goose! I have you here at hand, I see you every few days, I have just told you that I consider you a dear friend. What more do you want? As for your father, what more natural than that I should be interested in him? He is one of my earliest memories. My father and he were old associates, and my mother—has no little bird ever gossiped in your neighborhood that he and my mother used to be very—sympathetic?"

Charles turned fiery red to the edges of his ears.

"I—I don't know anything about that," he said stiffly. "I don't listen to gossip, and I should hardly think you would."

Sylvia withdrew her hand from his and leaned back, cold and angry. The outrageous presumption of this youth, to build a claim for her exclusive attention on the strength of a few good-natured words, and then to lecture her like a blue-nosed puritan for an allusion to an established fact a generation old! For one more such impertinence she would leave him flat, and never speak to him again. She had half a mind to do it, anyway. Yet there was his father—

She sat weighing the pros and cons, in a

silence as cold and heavy as a yesterday's omelet.

In this silence she became consciously aware—as she had been subconsciously ever since the interview began—of voices quite near at hand. The little room was separated from the next one by glass sliding doors, screened to the eye by curtains, but a flimsy barrier to sound. The voices were masculine, and the conversation desultory. Somebody seemed to be newly returned from a journey, and two or three other somebodies to be bringing his information on domestic affairs up to date. Sylvia listened without interest, bored and angry.

"Freddy and Sarah Saunders weather the gale?" inquired the traveler.

"Lord, no—they busted up last spring. Sarah's married to Jim Low now. Experienced couple, what?"

"Oh, that's only his second and her third—what the English lady called a mere boy-and-girl affair. I suppose Freddy's back in the club, then?"

"Yes, he says he's cured. Took the serum treatment, he says, and got immunized for life. He and Jerry Thorne are living together."

"That's a merry combination! Old Jerry in love, as usual?"

"Gosh, you ought to see him! And *who* do you think it's with? That's the biggest news yet!"

Sylvia darted a glance at her companion. Even in his normal state he was by no means as quick of ear or perception as she, and now, befogged by love, jealousy, and sulks, he was completely oblivious. He sat aloof and hot, enjoying his misery. Sylvia, desiring herself to hear more and him to hear nothing, began to woo him. She moved a little nearer, keeping one ear pricked to the glass door.

"Charles!" she said softly. "You remember I told you I dreamed of dancing with you?"

He whirled toward her like a piano stool, only too willing to be placated.

"Oh, yes! Did you, Sylvia? Did you really?"

"I will tell you about it. It was a big, shadowy place—you know how vague dreams are—fountains—flowers in the shadows—moonlight—and yet the divinest floor." She held him with her eyes, and talked with half of her mind, while the other half listened. "The music was di-

vine, too—"So This Is Love." She hummed the languorous, soppy air. "And we danced and danced. No one else—only we two."

"Oh, Sylvia!" breathed Charles.

"What, not Sylvia Schuyler?" demanded the voice of the returned traveler. "But that's impossible!"

"You'd say so if you saw her. She's Sylvia Orloff now; and changed? Baby! You know what a dreamy-eyed sort she used to be—beautiful, of course, but vague, and spiritual as hell. Well, now she could give Mitzi points. She's not quite so beautiful, but gosh, what zip! Her stories are—"

"Tell me more about it, Sylvia," implored Charles, the black beads incandescent. "Was it—was it a happy dream?"

"Oh, yes—it was wonderful! I saw you just as plainly as I see you now. Your eyebrows, you know, and your eyes, Abner—Charles—I could never forget them—"

"But it *can't* be Sylvia!" exclaimed the voice of the traveler. "Man, I tell you she's *dead*!"

Sylvia, suddenly giving up, fell back against the cushions. On the ghastly pallor of her face the pink cheeks and cerise lips stood unrelated and unreal, like a mask. She caught at her breath, like a person plunged into icy water. Charles was babbling with rapture. She put out a hand to silence him.

"Don't!" she gasped.

"Why, Sylvia—why Sylvia—wh-what's the matter?" stammered Charles.

"Be quiet!" she commanded in a choked whisper. "Listen!"

"Dead! Dead?" Three or four more voices were clamoring in different keys of amazement and incredulity. "Why, she's here! She's here now! She's out in front, dancing with Ludlow!"

"But I tell you she *is* dead! Don't I *know* it? One of the first things I did when I got over was to try to hunt her up. She used to be one of my best friends. For months I couldn't get any news at all. Then, in the spring, I heard she'd joined the Near East Relief; and finally, in the summer, I heard she'd been killed in the massacre at Assuat. Her mother was notified officially, and her things were sent home. And now you say she's here! Well, either I'm crazy or you are!"

"But she *is* here! Looks the same, talks the same—no, by jingo, she talks altogether

differently; but it *is* Sylvia. You'd only have to see her once. I tell you it *is* Sylvia!"

Charles Cunningham's horrified voice cut across the clamor, at Sylvia's other ear.

"Sylvia! What's this? What did he say? Why, how *can* he say you're dead? You—you're *here*!"

Sylvia sat up and drew a long, shuddering breath, like a corpse determined to come back to life. With a visible effort she whipped the strength into her limbs, the blood into her cheeks. She clutched Cunningham's hand.

"Of course I am here!" she said, in a hard, steady voice. "Come, let us show them!"

Loosing his hand as if she scorned outside help, she pulled herself up from the couch, like one lifting a heavy weight, and walked across the floor.

The voices still clamored confusedly on the other side of the door. She flicked the portière aside—its rings making a staccato click on the metal rod, like castanets—and flung the door open.

"You say Sylvia Schuyler is dead?" she cried. "Look!"

Her flair for the dramatic was perfect. All the faces turned to her like faces at the crisis of a play, blank and breathless. One man—evidently the newcomer—sprang to his feet, white with shock.

Sylvia swept a swift look over the room. It was blue with smoke, there was a card table in its midst, and two or three of its occupants were in business clothes. Evidently it was the retreat of those Bachelors who abstained from the dance—the club smoking room, the very center and boiling pot of gossip. She drew a long breath. This was her moment.

"You say I am dead," she repeated, looking at the white-faced traveler. "Well, I have been. And you"—pinning her brilliant glance on the other staring men—"you say I am changed. So would you be if you had been through death, and out on the other side, and back into the living world, like me. I have told no one of this, not even my cousin. Some things cannot be spoken of, if one is to hold fast to—to reason."

She broke off, biting her lip. Her two hands were clenched and pressed tightly on her breasts.

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed the white-faced man. "Don't, Sylvia! If I'd dreamed—"

"Yes, once," said Sylvia firmly. "I will speak of it this once, and then never again. You heard truly, my friend—I did join the Near East workers. My husband was dead, my life was very, very difficult. I felt that I must get away; and Mr. Willmot, whom I had known here in New York—you remember him—got me an appointment in Syria. I went at Christmas. Can it be last Christmas? It seems a thousand years ago! They sent me to a mission fifty miles north of Beirut, in a tiny, wild village. The natives were very hostile. They persecuted us continually in small ways, saying that we were magicians and devils. A child in our orphanage died, and they said we killed it. Then the leading man of the village was brought to our hospital with a gangrenous leg, and the surgeon said he must amputate. When the man heard that, he began to scream. His family began to scream. The villagers gathered outside the wall and began to scream that murder was being done. That was the end. They gathered in a mob—village people, desert people, wild people from God knows where. They attacked us, burning, pillaging, slaughtering—oh, there are no words for it! I saw the head nurse with her clothes torn half off and a dagger sticking out of her naked breast. The blood on her white uniform looked like spilled currant jelly. I saw the housekeeper, a pretty little plump pigeon, hauled by the hair, shrieking, into a room where filthy brown men crowded like vultures. I myself, running away, was caught by a great hairy creature with a knife, and carried off into the night. I fought like a wild beast, for more than life. I stabbed him with his own knife. I ran, I hid. I cowered in any hiding place I could find, like a runaway slave. At last, starving and terrified, I crawled into Beirut. People there sheltered me and nursed me back to health and sanity. And now I am here. I can tell no more!"

"Good God!" gasped one of the men. "To think of your living through that!"

"And we never knew!" ejaculated another. "You're a marvel, Mme. Orloff!"

"Sylvia!" cried the returned traveler. "I could shoot myself for bringing it all back to you! What you've suffered! It's amazing that a frail girl like you could bear it. Thank God you're here, anyway! You must forget it all now."

"Yes, yes, Sylvia! Yes, yes, forget it!" implored Charles Cunningham, in a voice

that trembled with emotion. "Forget it, Sylvia! Oh, S-Sylvia!"

Sylvia looked about again at them all. There was no doubt that she had suffered. Her forehead glistened with sweat, her breath came fast, her heart pumped so that the bright jet on her breast shivered; but her eyes flashed triumphantly over the awed, tense group.

"Think kindly of me," she said, in a clear voice. "I have borne much. Good night!"

Before any one could speak, she had gone swiftly back through the glass door.

"Oh, Sylvia!" exclaimed Charles, following her like a loose shoe string. "You—you're wonderful, Sylvia! You're more wonderful than ever! You're my princess! What—oh, what can I do for you?"

"You can take me home, Charles," said Sylvia, in an exhausted voice. "I am very tired."

"Oh, may I?" cried the breathless swain. "Oh, thank you! No wonder you're tired, after all you've been through; but you suffered in a good cause, Sylvia. I—I'd do anything in the world for you now!"

"Then," said Sylvia, "it was not wasted. Come on home, Charles."

IV

SYLVIA'S arrival, following the inactive period of Anne's mother's illness and Anne's mourning, had had a stimulating effect on Anne's social sense. Her dignified Park Avenue house had blossomed out, this last month, like an elderly lady after the gland treatment. To-night she was having a dinner of twelve—all young people who had been at dancing school with her and Sylvia, and who had a thousand jolly memories in common. Flowers and chatter, champagne and laughter mingled over a substratum of youth and delicious food, and any one who heard the merry din would have been convinced that the party was a success.

Sylvia, as usual, was the center and fountainhead of animation. Always at her best in the evening, to-night she was brilliantly beautiful, in a shimmering gown of green, flashing with sequins, clingingly outlining her supple slenderness, and so daringly cut that none but her most vital statistics remained undiscovered. The meal was nearly over, the champagne was considerably depleted, and she had reached the pitch of reckless vivacity at which her admirers found her most admirable. Her

neighbors—especially the masculine ones—were hanging on her words.

"Tell us another, Sylvia!" begged Jerry. "You're the best story teller since What's-Her-Name kept 'em sitting up a thousand and one nights!"

"Ah, I do not know any more," protested Sylvia. "This is the thousand and second night. I am like the old lady who said there were three things she never could remember. One was names, and one was dates, and she had forgotten what the other one was."

"Oh, go on, Sylvia!" insisted the neighbors. "Don't be a tightwad! Loosen up with another!"

"Very well, I will tell you—to put you to sleep—the dear old nursery tale about the English nobleman who gave a house party in his ancestral halls, which had not enough bathrooms. The guests were put on a ten-minute schedule for their morning baths, and one young man, mistaking his time, walked in on the hostess. He was greatly distressed, and rushed to his host:

"Lord Cholmondeley, I apologize abjectly! By accident I intruded on Lady Cholmondeley in her bath! Do with me what you will!"

"Oh, don't mention it, my dear fellow," said the host. "Haw! She's a skinny old party, ain't she?"

Under cover of the shout, Anne turned to Keith. He and she had drawn very close of late, in the tacit sympathy of a kindred trouble. Keith loved Sylvia unwillingly and helplessly, hurt anew each day by her flippancy, her cynicism, her many declensions from the ideal he had cherished. Anne, without intention or desire, had long ago fallen into a deeply silent love for Jerry, which, being more than half maternal, only increased as he showed himself more irresponsible and reckless. The high-voltage love affair now going on between Sylvia and Jerry—intense and exclusive on his side, one of several on hers—stabbed them both in the same sore place; but Keith was too proud, and Anne too generous, to attempt defense or reprisals.

Keith met Anne's questioning look with bitter blue eyes.

"Going strong, isn't she?" he commented. "Suits Jerry, anyway."

Anne flushed, but rose to it in her gallant good-sport way.

"Why, Keith, that story's nothing!"

"Nothing to what she can do, I grant

you," he answered moodily; "but I tell you, Anne, I'd give my left hand to hear her talk just once the way she used to. Nothing out of her any more, ever, but pickles and froth!"

"But, Keith dear, give her time. She's only been home a month; and you heard what came out at the Bachelors'—how she's been through merry Hades and never told a soul. She's wonderful, you know. I think she puts on this don't-care stuff for a mask, to hide what she's suffered."

Keith looked down the table at Sylvia, who was busy dipping her cigarette stub in Jerry's champagne, and marking what she called a telephone dial on his shirt front. "It's a darned good mask, then," he said. "I don't see why she can't prick a hole or two in it for people who are starved for a look at her face. I never understood that Near East business, anyway—she off getting massacred by wops in the desert, and you corresponding with her all the time and never getting a hint."

"Oh, she explained that," said Anne quickly. "She didn't want me to know, partly because I'd worry, and partly because she was afraid I'd suspect how driven to drink she'd been before she came to it; so she sent her letters to Vienna, and had them posted there. I remember how queer they were, never really telling anything. It's easy enough to see, now, that they were all hokum. It's all right—Sylvia's all *right*, Keith!"

She leaned toward him, her clear, fine face alight with earnestness. Keith's eyes softened as he looked at her.

"If she's half as right as you are, she's right enough for anybody," he said affectionately. "I think you're a marvel, Anne, staying so loyal to her in the face of—all this!"

A rush of uncontrollable tears clouded Anne's gray eyes.

"If I can't stay loyal to Sylvia," she replied in a low, passionate voice, "there—there'll be nothing left to be loyal to!"

Her glance flew betrayingly down the table to where Jerry's back, turned uncompromisingly to the rest of the company, held up like a sandwich board the legend of his exclusive devotion.

"And now, *mes enfants*," Sylvia was saying, in her beautiful, crisp diction which neither champagne, excitement, nor love could blur, "I will give you the dance of Miranda. It is a simple pastime that I

learned in my innocent childhood. Give me your handkerchief, Jerree."

She took the square of linen, rolled its corners deftly into four twists, and, holding it so that her forefinger made a head and the twists two long arms and two long legs, began to dance it on the table close to Jerry's goblet, chanting:

"Miranda was a merry maid;
She'd dance all day for a lemonade;
And if you gave her a glass of beer,
She'd kick till she hit the chandelier!"

At the last syllable she let go one of the long legs, which flew up with surprising vigor and struck the glass neatly on the rim. It fell over with a tinkling crash, the champagne ran out on the table, the on-lookers jumped and shouted, and Sylvia crowded with laughter at the success of her trick.

Poor Anne, who drank nothing but water, and had to look on at this innocent merriment in the state technically known as "cold sober," felt that she had had enough. She rose.

"Come, let's have a change of scene and some coffee!" she said, and, ably seconded by Keith, herded the assembly into the drawing-room.

But Sylvia was at too high a pitch of spirits to be quenched by coffee. She stood in the middle of the room, brilliant with excitement and mischief.

"Now," she said, "I will do Miranda for you myself. Jerree, get me your hat. Start the music, somebody. Somebody push back the rugs. Now pour into my mouth a little coffee, and I will dance steadily, industriously, without inspiration, like Miranda with the lemonade."

Laughing, everybody obeyed her. One of the men put a record on the talking machine, two or three cleared the floor, Jerry hurried off for his hat, Dick Spence fed her coffee with a spoon. She put her arms akimbo and began to dance like a dancing doll—right foot, left foot, pirouette, turn.

"More coffee!" she commanded.

Her attendant, giggling, poured another spoonful into her open red mouth. The others all crowded around, laughing and cheering, and Sylvia's spirits grew wilder. She jiggled faster and faster, demanding coffee at every whirl. Dick Spence, helpless with merriment, missed her mouth and spilled it down her white neck. Everybody shouted, and the men mopped at her, as she revolved, with their handkerchiefs.

Anne and Keith stood side by side, ill at ease, she fresh and out-of-doorsy and wholly alien to the picture, he glooming darkly.

Jerry came back from the hall. His hat was an opera hat, the kind that crushes flat by means of a spring. Sylvia squealed with delight when she saw it.

"Ah, *now* Miranda can dance!" she cried. "Anne's chandelier I will not aspire to—it is ten feet up, and my poor legs are but a yard long; but Jerree shall be my chandelier. Dick, get me a liqueur—that will be Miranda's beer. Jerree, hold your hat high—no, *high*, above your head. Oil the machine, Dick. Do not spill it this time. Ready, Jerree—and *now* watch me put out the light!"

She flung herself into a whirl of activity, catching up her narrow skirt for more freedom, pricking the air with swift stabs of her green satin slippers. Everybody crowded close. The phonograph blared its syn-copated, barbaric music. Jerry held the hat above her head. She gathered herself together for the crisis—and *ping*, with a flash of green silk stocking and pink silk underwear, with a shout of applause from the audience and a crow of triumph from the dancer, with a little report as of a beaten drum, the hat collapsed, kicked in the very middle.

"Right in the bull's-eye! Sylvia, you're a wonder!"

"Jerry pressed the spring, though."

"What if he did? She kicked it like a football player."

"She's got Pavlova beaten!"

They all talked at once; and Sylvia, with her skirt clutched in her two hands and raised to her knees, stood in the midst, breathless and laughing.

At this auspicious moment Anne, turning to speak to the silent Keith, became aware of newcomers in the doorway.

They were two men. They stood still on the threshold, a good deal startled. Anne, going forward to meet them, found herself flushing as if it were her own pink silk underwear that had just been in evidence.

One of them was Charles Cunningham, and even at first glance there needed no introduction to tell who the other was. While the two were not more alike than is common with father and son—one head being iron-gray and the other sleek black, one figure heavy and the other trig—the oddity

of the black eyebrows meeting over the Roman nose set them apart as being of one blood.

"How do you do?" said Anne, greeting them with nervous cordiality. "I'm awfully glad to see you. Do come in!"

"I—I think we'd better not," said Charles unhappily. "I feel—I feel we're intruding. I—the butler didn't tell us you were having a party."

His eyes were glued to Sylvia, half in horror and half in fascination.

"Oh, this isn't a party," protested Anne. "It's just a few boys and girls who went to dancing school with us. We'll be awfully hurt if you don't stay. Sylvia wants so much to see you, Mr. Cunningham. She has often spoken of her father's friendship for you."

"I want to see her," said the elder Cunningham; "and I do—I see an eyeful. You don't need to point her out, Miss Schuyler. She's more like her mother than her mother was herself."

Anne laughed.

"So I've always heard. Sit down here, two Mr. Cunninghams, won't you? I'll bring her."

Sylvia was dancing again, this time with Jerry. Held very close in his arms, she was teaching him an intricate and not very decorous step, which, she said, was what they called *le tango Américain* at the Bal Bullier. At Anne's interruption she turned with a slight frown of impatience on her flushed, beautiful face.

"Do not distract us, Anne! I am preparing Jerree to lead the Sunday evening meeting of the Epworth League. Now—one, two, three, four! Lift the left knee higher!"

"I'm sorry, Sylvia," said Anne, "but Charles Cunningham's brought his father to call, and I thought you wanted to see him. He's over there by the fireplace."

"Charles Cunningham's father!" exclaimed Sylvia. "Oh, I do! I must see him!"

She slipped quickly out of Jerry's arms, and began trying with nervous touches to smooth her frock and hair into decorum.

"Oh, I say!" protested Jerry. "I was just getting ready to make Terpsichore look like a one-legged piano. You're a brute, Anne!"

Anne smiled valiantly, and, slipping her arm through Sylvia's, led her to the corner where she had established the visitors. Syl-

via tried to walk sedately. She was still flushed, but now she wore her color differently—nervously, uneasily. Her brilliant glance was fixed on the elder man.

It was odd to see how the four black eyes of the two Cunninghams, as if moved by one impulse, passed simultaneously over Anne and converged on Sylvia. Both men came forward with hands outstretched, but it was the father who arrived first and got the slender fingers.

"Well, Miss Sylvia!" he said. "You've multiplied yourself by about five, in age and size, since I saw you. I'm glad to see you again."

As soon as he opened his mouth, it was evident that the resemblance between him and his son was only eyebrow deep. His speech was trenchant and decisive, his eyes very keen. Charles looked dull and ineffectual beside him.

Sylvia returned his greeting with a charming youthful deference, quite new to her gamut of expressions.

"Oh, I am so glad to know my father's friend!" she breathed. "Your face has stayed in my memory all these years. I knew your son by his likeness to you." This reminded her of poor Charles, hovering superfluously on the outskirts, and she gave him a negligent left hand. "Hello, Charles!" she added.

"He's not like me the way you're like your mother," said the elder man. "We're just a couple of Cunninghams, but you're two halves of the same twin. Shall we sit down and have a powwow?"

"Oh, yes, let us! It has been my great hope ever since I came home," said Sylvia eagerly.

Carefully yielding him the place by the fireside, she sat respectfully and youthfully on a small straight-backed chair at a little distance.

The others seated themselves, too, ready for the soul feast: and a constraint to which Sylvia's neighborhood was a total stranger fell on them. Sylvia herself, rosy with champagne, caught up out of a wild festival mood into the need for a decorous one, was manifestly ill at ease. Anne was acutely embarrassed by the bacchanalian atmosphere which the eminent stranger had discovered in her house. Charles had reached that pitiable state of infatuation which can be articulate on only one subject.

As for Abner Cunningham, he was a veteran lawyer, accustomed to waiting for

situations to shape themselves. He sat back at ease, watching the constrained group with a twinkle in his shrewd eyes.

"Shall you be long in New York, Mr. Cunningham?" asked Sylvia, with an effort, after a long pause.

"A couple of weeks," answered the lawyer laconically.

There was another pause: then Anne tried.

"Do you come often?" she inquired.

"Twice a year," said Mr. Cunningham, his twinkle intensifying a trifle.

Another pause.

"I believe," said Sylvia, "your son told me that the climate here affects your health."

"Makes me wheeze like a porpoise," affirmed the visitor.

Silence fell again. Then Anne turned to the younger Cunningham with an effect of desperation.

"Don't you want to dance?" she said.

"Everybody's doing it. Come on—let's!"

Charles cast a glance of yearning regret at Sylvia, and dragged himself up.

"That 'll be fine," he murmured sadly.

Left alone with Sylvia, Abner Cunningham allowed his twinkle to express itself in a chuckle.

"That's the way to do it—wear 'em down," he said. "I wanted a real talk with you, not a flimflam chitchat with the whole party. Well, what have you been doing all this time, Miss Sylvia?"

Sylvia, somewhat relieved, but still guarded, made a vague, graceful gesture.

"Oh, so many things! I grew up and went abroad to join my mother. I married a Russian, and he died. Anne offered me a home, and I came back."

"Pooh, that's obituary stuff! I might as well wait till you pass on, and then look you up in the encyclopedia. Come over here by me, where we won't have to bawl at each other, and give me a few facts."

Sylvia obeyed, taking the chair which Charles had just vacated. Her assurance was coming back, and she flashed the lawyer a smile as she settled down beside him.

"What facts? Weight, height, income, favorite brand of pills? Facts—they are as numerous as germs *ici-bas*, and as various!"

"Tell me why you went abroad, to start off with."

Asking permission with a perfunctory gesture, he lighted a cigar, and regarded

her quizzically and approvingly through the smoke.

"I went to find my mother—my poor mother, so misunderstood by a narrow world—and to give her the solace of my moral support."

Sylvia tried to speak gravely, but either the champagne or the subtler intoxicant of masculine approval betrayed her, and she rolled her eyes with a solemn expression of filial piety that was irresistibly comic. Abner Cunningham chuckled.

"By George, but you're like her! And when you found your martyred mother, what did you do with her?"

"I bound up her wounds, and anointed her with money, and left her a first-aid kit of American Express checks for future pangs."

"I'll bet you didn't stay with her long!"

"I stayed as long as she wanted me."

"I believe you. She never cared for much traffic with women. Well, so far, so good; now what brought you back?"

"I have told you. My mother no longer wanted me, my brute of a husband was dead, and my cousin offered me a home."

"Nonsense! You got my letter, didn't you?"

"Er—oh, yes."

"I thought so. Wasn't that what brought you? Come, tell the truth, Miss Sylvia! I knew your mother very well, years ago. You can't fool me with any of her monkeyshines."

"*Eh bien*, yes—that, and the desire for a sight of your *beaux yeux*."

She made a flippant little gesture, full of redeeming witchery, at him.

"By George, you're an apple off the old tree! Except that Sylvia never had your style or your accent, you're her very self. All right—you came because you got my letter. When did you get it?"

"In October."

"What day, I mean?"

"Oh, I do not remember. Do you think I carry a recording angel in my head?"

"Then my labor was all wasted. I went to a heap of trouble to have it reach you on your birthday, because that was the day your father specified for the notification."

A flicker passed over Sylvia's eyes, but she answered nonchalantly.

"It may have done so," she said. "I am now of an age to ignore birthdays. Tell me, how did you reach me? You did not ask Anne?"

"No—you left your mother's address with my partner when you settled your affairs. By the way, didn't you wonder why your father hadn't left you more money?"

"Oh, no—I am not mercenary. I never gave it a thought." She glanced at him out of the corners of her eyes, to see the effect of this pronouncement, and then added, with a casual afterthought: "But how much is it? Your partner would not tell me. He said I must wait until you came."

Abner Cunningham's shrewd eyes twinkled again.

"I thought her blood wasn't entirely defunct in you. My partner doesn't know himself. The transaction was entirely between your father and me. Come to my office next week, and I'll tell you about it."

"Oh, tell me now!"

"No, no—this is a social occasion. Mustn't mix business with pleasure."

"But what is so great a pleasure as hearing about money? Please, dear man—dear, charming, delightful man—tell me!"

She leaned toward him in an ardor of coaxing, her elbows on the arm of his chair, her breath against his cheek. He looked at her with a visible melting of his crisp, keen shrewdness.

"You witch, you!" he muttered. "She's absolutely alive in you. All right, I'll tell you. It's—about—a million dollars."

"Oh!" cried Sylvia. "A mil-lion dol-lars! Oh!" Flames lighted in her eyes and her cheeks. She jumped to her feet in a transport of ecstasy. "Oh, you darling!" she cried. "Come, let us dance! Yes, yes, you can! After such news I will not let you sit still!"

Seizing his hands, she dragged him out of his chair to the cleared space, where the talking machine still blared, and slid into his arms in her experienced way.

"Dance, dear man—dance!" she adjured. "Dance the Dance of the Million Dollars, more beautiful than the Dance of the Hours, more intoxicating than the Dance of the Seven Veils! Come, dance with me!"

Hypnotized, the staid middle-aged man of law shuffled after her in a sort of rhythmic walk, like a trick bear being put through his paces by an expert trainer.

"Nobody but your—er—your father's daughter could make me do this!" he panted. "Look out for your feet!"

Keith and Anne, separating from their respective partners, drifted together on the

edge of the floor like two depressed pieces of sediment, and contemplated the new couple with amazement and dismay.

"Holy Moses, now she's roped the old man!" exclaimed Keith bitterly. "I believe she'd tackle the Pope if she had him handy!"

Anne shook her head.

"Something's certainly happened to Sylvia," she admitted sadly.

V

SYLVIA—a different Sylvia—stood on the doorstep of the Park Avenue Schuylers' house, her hand upraised to press the bell. She stood like a statue. The push button was there, her finger was on it; but such a surge of memories and emotions pounded at her chest that she could not finish the motion.

She had so longed for this moment, so despaired of ever attaining it, that, now it was here, it and she and the dear old stolid house seemed part of a dream. Anne separated from her by only a stone wall—herself really home again, lost and lone and exiled no longer, with past horrors past forever, and nothing to look forward to but the safe warmth of peace and love—she caught her breath in a happy sob.

Forcing herself with a determined effort, she pushed the pearl button, and at once the door swung open like a piece of well oiled machinery. She was taken aback; there never used to be this perfection of rapid service in poor fussy Aunt Addie's time. The impeccable near-English butler on the threshold was a stranger. The decoration of the hall, too, was strange; and this chilled a little the exuberant joy of her home-coming.

"Is Miss Schuyler at home?" she asked.

The butler's fishy eyes widened a little upon her.

"No, Mme. Orloff. She has gone to a committee meeting."

Sylvia started at the sound of her name. She had supposed herself as complete a stranger to this honorific appendage as was the butler to her.

"She expects me, then!" she exclaimed in an astonished voice.

His eyebrows rose to the extreme limit that the laws of nature permit to a butler's eyebrows—nearly one-sixteenth of an inch.

"Certainly, madam," he said coldly. "Do you wish this bag taken to your room?"

"If you please," answered Sylvia.

Convicted, as one always is by a butler's surprise, of a *faux pas* verging on indecency, she ventured no further comment, but allowed herself to be conducted in silence to the lift and along the upper corridor.

Inwardly she was profoundly puzzled. How could her arrival, which she had kept for such a stupendous surprise, have become known to Anne? And if Anne knew, how could she be anywhere but here to greet the returned prodigal—after these five interminable years, after a death and a resurrection, after a lifetime wherein they had been more than sisters? It was very strange.

The butler set the bag down inside the door of the rose suite.

"Shall you be at-home at-tea, madam?" he inquired, with a technique that was English to admiration, emitting a forceful eruption of "t's" while hardly opening his mouth at all.

"Yes—but don't tell Miss Anne when she comes in. I want to surprise her."

His eyebrows rose again, so far that a wrinkle threatened to crack the smooth enamel of his forehead. It was easy to see that he was strongly tempted to speak; but his professional honor held good, and he merely bowed and receded with a long-drawn, melancholy motion, like an ebb tide.

Sylvia leaned against the inside of the door, gazing about her through tears that rose from a heart unendurably full. Home at last—really home! How warm and serene and safe the house felt, after all the turmoil and danger! How charming the rooms were, so fresh and rosy! Dear Anne must have had them done over on purpose, bless her!

How delicious to think of resting here, of forgetting all the aches and anguishes, of expanding and growing normal again in Anne's steady, understanding affection—and of love even more precious, still waiting, perhaps, just around the corner, ready to be gathered and cherished!

She would take off her hat, she thought, and tidy herself and settle her handful of belongings. When Anne came in, she would go down to claim her happiness as naturally as if she had never lost it.

She went eagerly forward into the bright, flowery bedroom to make her simple preparations. But now, looking about with clearer eyes, she was struck by a new sur-

prise. These rooms were already occupied. Bits of feminine frippery lay about here and there, a pair of pink satin slippers peeped from under the edge of the bed, the dressing table was full of gold-topped jars and boxes.

How extraordinary of so polished a butler to put her into rooms that already harbored another guest! She must ring for him at once, and have herself transferred before some one took her for a burglar.

She started to press the bell, which was beside the dressing table; but before her hand reached it, her eye was caught by a letter that lay among the gold-topped jars. The envelope was addressed to herself. There could be no mistake. In bold black script it presented the loathed name which even now, after bearing it four years, she never read without a pang—"Mme. Boris Orloff."

Expected—to the point of correspondence—and expected in this room, littered with another woman's belongings! Mystified, Sylvia took up the letter and opened it. It added to her mystification to find that the seal had already been broken.

It was a very Ritzy letter, written in a dashing hand on heavy paper, which bore a Long Island address. It read:

DARLING SYLVIA:

Here are the snapshots of the house party. Quick work, what? You are perfect, as usual. I snapped some of them off watch, and I wish you'd notice the men—all their eyes simply popping out at you. We had a merry time, what? See you Saturday.

Yours ever,

POBBLES.

Sylvia's astonishment increased as she read. Had she lost her reason? She had landed an hour ago from a French liner, she had not thought of Long Island for at least five years, and she did not know any one, even a dog, who answered to the name of Pobbles.

She dropped the letter on the dressing table, and examined the photographs it inclosed. The first showed no one she had ever seen. The second contained two or three vaguely familiar, half forgotten faces. In the third she discovered, with a sense of reassurance, dear Anne and Jerry Thorne.

The fourth was a group of ornamental young people on the terrace of an opulent mansion, all clustering around a central person, who seemed to be telling a story or doing a trick, and all showing a hypno-

tized attention. Between their fascinated shoulders Sylvia could see the face of the fascinator. She stared at it for a long, incredulous minute, and then dropped limply into the chair before the dressing table.

"Sylvia!" she ejaculated.

Her own face stared at her from the mirror, and she looked from it to the photograph and back again. In the glass she saw a beautiful woman, pale, worn, weary, and aghast. In the photograph she saw the same face gay, sparkling, and alight with impish mirth.

The face in the mirror undoubtedly looked the older of the two. The hair of the living Sylvia, softly dark and abundant, was drawn into an easy-going arrangement that denoted the minimum of bother compatible with decent results; the hair of the pictured one was a finished, authentic work of art. Living Sylvia's face was bare of make-up; pictured Sylvia's was accented by deftly sharpened lines of lips and eyebrows. Living Sylvia was a trifle the thinner.

For all that, a casual survey might have pronounced them the same woman under different circumstances; and Sylvia recognized the fact with a bitter little smile.

"You could get away with it, Sylvia," she said to the picture, "and I see you have. But why? You've long ago had my money and my freedom and my peace of mind. Why do you want my poor old face, too? Goodness knows your own's efficient—a thousand-ship-power face, like Helen's—and mine was made only for one little happiness!"

Suddenly she burst into a storm of tears and buried her face in her arms on the dressing table.

"You shan't! You shan't!" she sobbed. "You shan't steal my home-coming! You've had everything else—I'll have this! I'll tell them! I'll put you out! I'll—"

Yet even now, in her anger, she could not bear the sound of the harsh words. She choked them off, and sobbed helplessly.

After a while she sat up and dried her eyes. She had learned by bitter experience that tears would profit her nothing. The mirror confronted her again, and she looked at it wearily.

"It is no use," she told her reflection. "I can't play the avenging angel to her. I've forgiven her too many times; and, after all, she's still my mother, and I still love her—God knows why!"

Then she repented of her bitterness, for she was one of those stubborn idealists who cherish faith to the last dying flicker.

"Perhaps she had a real reason," she thought. "Perhaps she's heard I'm not dead, and wants to keep my place for me. Perhaps—anyway, I can't throw her over now. I've stood by her too long. Well, if I'm going, I may as well go!"

She looked around forlornly. There were not many preparations to make for departure. She had not so much as taken off her gloves, and her suit case still stood where the solemn butler had left it, in the sitting room. She picked it up with a little twisted smile.

"My home-coming was short and sweet," she said. "Good-by, dear home! Good-by, dear, dear happiness!"

Choking back a sob, she closed the door behind her.

To play the game, she must avoid notice as far as possible; so she refrained from calling the lift, and trudged down the two flights of stairs. She met no one on the way, even in the lower hall, and—congratulating herself drearly on her success—she turned toward the front door.

To reach it she must pass the door of the morning room; and there such a throng of memories reached out and clutched her by the throat that she was forced to stand still for a minute.

"Surely," she thought, "there isn't any danger in one little look! The room's empty—and I've been so happy there!"

So she stood on the threshold like the peri, taking one little look; and then, almost before she knew it, she had slipped inside.

This room was endeared to her by a thousand associations. It had been the center of all the real home life that her motherless girlhood had known. The library beyond it was the somber and stately lair of Uncle James, the drawing-room across the hall was the fussy shrine of Aunt Addie, all knickknacks and fringe and nervous volubility; but the morning room had belonged to Anne and Sylvia.

Here they had entertained their swains and held their informal merrymakings. Here they had planned their rainbow futures. Here Sylvia had told Anne the dawning marvel of Keith Ludlow's love before that love had even become articulate. Here Anne had confessed, with her straightforward unafraidness, that for her there

would never be any man but Jerry Thorne, and that Jerry didn't care a rap for her.

This room, like the others that Sylvia had seen, had been renovated into a new freshness and charm; but you couldn't change it with papers or paints or stuffs. This room was Anne.

"Anne!" thought Sylvia, gazing hungrily at the place she had pictured a thousand times during the long, homesick years. "If I could see you only once—only for one little minute! Oh, Anne, I wish I could see you!"

And as if the intensity of her wish had been potent to effect what the mediums call a materialization, at that very moment she heard, with a shock, the sound of Anne's voice in the hall.

"Johnson!" it said briskly. "Serve tea in the morning room, please—now."

"Yes, miss," replied the butler's solemn tones.

Sylvia heard a little rustle of Anne's taking off her coat, a little click of buttons as she dropped it on the wooden settee, and then the light, firm sound of her feet approaching across the hardwood floor.

There was not an instant for reflection or choice. There she was, the old Sylvia, in her old gray suit, with her old suit case in her hand. She might as well cry her mother an impostor from the housetops as show herself here. It was out of the question to attempt to escape unseen, with Anne in the hall, the butler moving kitchenward, and the other Sylvia likely to appear at any minute. She did by instinct what any intruder caught in a false position would do. She slipped into the next room as fast as she could slip, and hid behind the door.

Anne came forward slowly, opening a letter which she had evidently picked up in the hall, and Sylvia watched her greedily through the crack of the door. If the room was little changed, Anne was less so. There was something eternal about her quality, fire-clean, steel-strong, water-clear. She was no beauty, certainly; but she was so fine and thoroughbred, her gray eyes were so frank and her generous mouth so humorously sympathetic, that to the most captious she must have seemed easy of contemplation; and to Sylvia she looked like a heavenly vision.

She went and stood by the fireplace, warming a foot on the fender as she read her letter. The envelope slipped out of her fingers and fluttered into the blaze, and she

said "Damn!"—not with heat, but temperately and kindly. Sylvia was hard put to it not to run to her and hug her.

"Oh, now I know why Sylvia's staying," she thought. "She's staying to be with Anne. Anne's such a blessed old dear that even Sylvia can't resist her. I ought to find it easy to forgive that—I want so horribly much to stay with her myself!"

Anne finished her letter, and folded it, frowned thoughtfully at its unenveloped exterior, and crossed the room to file it, in her tidy, systematic way, in the "unanswered" pigeonhole of her desk. Then she came back again to the fire and sat down in her low chair, facing Sylvia.

The light of the burning logs and of the shaded lamp shone on her face more fully now than when she had stood, and for the first time Sylvia found a difference in her expression. She looked less buoyant than she used to be, and graver. Her eyes held a shadow that never had dwelt there in the old days; and, for a wonder, as she waited for her tea she neither read, nor wrote, nor knitted, nor gave any other evidence of her usual unquenchable energy. Evidently, something was troubling Anne.

Sylvia's heart grew heavier in instant sympathy, for she could not bear to have Anne unhappy; but before she had time to formulate a theory, the butler loomed in the doorway, majestically propelling the tea tray with his *embonpoint*, and Anne was her alert self again.

"Thank you, Johnson," said Anne. "When Mme. Orloff comes in, tell her tea's in here, will you?"

"Mme. Orloff is already at-home, miss," conceded Johnson indulgently.

"Then announce it to her upstairs, please, and ask her whether she'd rather come down or have it sent up."

Johnson bowed and withdrew on his errand of mercy, and Anne set about preparing tea for two. Her hands moved swiftly, yet without haste or fussiness, and Sylvia watched her with fascinated attention. Every movement that Anne made was so wholly Anne herself, poised and capable and dependable, that it was like food to the watcher's hunger.

"Tea!" exclaimed a voice on the threshold. "God be thanked, with the thanks of a starving woman!"

"Hello, Sylvia!" said Anne. "Johnson must have called you by telepathy. How did you get here so soon?"

"Johnson did not call me at all. I came under my own steam, as Jerree says," returned Sylvia the supplanter, crossing the threshold. "I only this minute entered the house, with my so-convenient latchkey which you have just permitted me, and which makes me feel that I have really cut my second teeth at last."

"That's funny," said Anne. "Johnson told me you were in already."

"He must be getting second sight, or foresight, or whatever it is that makes people see double," said Sylvia carelessly, as she sat down by the fire. "Tea, Anne! I am dying, Egypt, dying—for tea!"

"It's all ready," answered Anne. "I put a dash of rum in yours, as usual. Here are the eats."

"They don't love each other," thought Sylvia in the dark. "Anne doesn't love Sylvia, Sylvia doesn't love Anne."

She peered anxiously through the crack, forgetting the odium of her position as an eavesdropper in the intensity of her absorption in these two vital parts of her life.

The supplanting Sylvia leaned back in a deep chair, sipping her tea. Anne had put a little table at her elbow, with sandwiches and cakes, and she reached lazily for a morsel, which she nibbled with her dainty greed. She looked indolent, exquisite, and puissant, as if she were by inherent right monarch of all her surroundings, as if she had but to stretch forth her hand for anything she wanted and take it. Sylvia in the dark had an impulse of indignation toward her—followed, as always, by one of remorseful, indulgent tenderness.

"Well, what have you been doing, *chérie*?" inquired Sylvia the supplanter. "Good works, as ever?"

"Oh, nothing so damnably good," answered Anne. "I've been to the Girls' Club. The girls staged a debate on the child labor amendment, and you ought to have heard them go it. They know all about it, poor kids, having labored themselves. I had to call time on them twice, to give them a chance to cool off."

Sylvia yawned daintily.

"I suppose you have them under your thumb," she remarked, "as you have all the rest of us."

Anne laughed.

"Oh, I boss them around something savage," she said good-naturedly. "I forgot how it bores you to hear about them. 'Scuse me. Did *you* have a good time?"

"*Cost cost*. I went with Jerree to see the Mestrovicz sculptures. Jerree was amusing, but the sculptures were so dull that the balance was not even; and after a while I grew annoyed at him for brightening them so little. Then he was cross. He has a naughty temper. Another cup, please, *chérie*!"

Anne turned away a little as she poured it out.

"Sylvia," she said in a constrained voice, "I—don't think I'm trying to crash in on your affairs, but—I wish you'd—do something about Jerry."

"Do something! My life, I do everything except feed him! I have seen him every day for a week. Do you want me to take him to the dentist?"

"I want you either to take him for good or leave him alone. He—he's suffering, Sylvia. I've seen him through a dozen cases, but never anything like this. Can't you put him out of his misery, one way or the other?"

A little pause ensued—a cold little pause.

"Oh, that's it!" thought Sylvia in the dark. "She isn't staying for Anne—she's staying for Jerry. Oh, my poor, precious Anne, it's all over with you, if Sylvia wants him!"

"I know it isn't my affair," added Anne uncomfortably, breaking the silence; "but I can't bear to see Jerry suffer. Can't you—make him happy, Sylvia?"

Sylvia sat up straight in her deep chair.

"My dear Anne," she said, "you say truly that it is not your affair. I cannot imagine anything less so. I have had much, much experience in men, *ma chère*. Viewed as cases, I could count them three, four, for each finger of my two hands; and I may tell you that your solicitude is entirely misplaced. The rule for success with men is the same as with roast chickens—keep them moving and baste them frequently, if you want them to be tender. At the same time, I realize that you have a special interest in this charming Jerree, and I will reassure you that I am treating him quite, quite gently. I may have been a little severe to-day, but to-morrow I make up. I go with him to tea, to dance, to the automobile show. Then he will be happy as a little boy with a new loud horn."

"That's just it," said Anne distressfully. "To-day you make him miserable, to-morrow you make him happy. You keep the poor chap twirling until he doesn't know

where he's at. Don't you see, Sylvia, you owe it to him, in appreciation of his—his love for you, to settle it one way or the other?"

Sylvia the supplanter, having finished her tea, rose regally.

"Really, you are almost as tiresome as Keith!" she rebuked. "You both went to church too much in your youth, and you have acquired the preaching habit. It is a vice whose very absence is a charm. I will leave you, until the fit is past."

She gathered her wraps and moved toward the door, delicately and scornfully, like an offended queen; but as she reached the threshold she turned, sparkling suddenly into her irresistible smile.

"Fear not, *mon chou!*" she said. "Tomorrow I will be amiable—so amiable that both you and Jerree will forget all about righteousness!"

Left alone, Anne set down her cup, which she had hardly tasted. The light on the table beside her shone in her face, showing it tired and wan. She reached over and turned the switch off, and then leaned back in her chair, very still in the firelight. Her hands lay lax in her lap, and her straight tailored frock was stirred by a deep sigh.

Sylvia watched her with yearning.

"Dear Anne, I love you so!" she thought. "I *wish* I could give him to you! But it's no use thinking about that until I know what Sylvia means, for if she wants him you haven't a chance. Oh, Anne, I do love you! How can I bear to go away from you again? But I must go, and quickly. Hurry, Anne dear, let me go! I *mustn't* be caught here!"

The minutes passed. The room was very quiet. No one came for the tea things, the function having been so unusually abbreviated, and nothing moved except the moving flames. Sylvia held herself tense, afraid that the smallest change of position would betray her in the stillness. Pins and needles pricked her in unexpected places, and her heart beat so loud that she thought Anne would hear it.

"I can't stand it much longer," she thought. "I *can't* keep so still, I *can't* be so near Anne and not speak to her!"

But she held on heroically, body and spirit.

At last, with a little quivering sigh, Anne moved her head so that her cheek lay against the back of the chair; and Sylvia saw that she had fallen asleep. It was now

or never. Johnson would be coming for the tray, the parlor maid would be drawing the curtains and tidying the rooms for the evening, a new phase of the household's activity would begin. She stole softly out of her hiding place, a ghost that must lose no time in slipping back to oblivion.

But as she passed Anne's chair, once more temptation was too strong for her, and she stopped for an instant. There were tears on Anne's firm cheek—tears that those bright, dear eyes would never have let slip except in the uncontrol of sleep. The sight pulled unendurably at Sylvia's heartstrings. She bent and kissed them.

"Darling Anne!" she whispered.

Anne moved a little, and smiled.

"Sylvia, dearest!" she murmured.

"You've come home!"

Sylvia caught up her suit case again, and fled from the room—none too soon, and none too safely, either, for as she reached the hall she heard Anne's startled voice calling:

"Sylvia!"

No one was in the hall. She ran to the big door, wrenched it open, and drew it shut as quickly and silently as she could. In her mind Anne's voice echoed—"Sylvia!"—but now she was beyond its radius, outside in the dark and the cold.

"No use calling me, Anne," she said forlornly. "I haven't come home. I haven't any home to come to now. I'm just a ghost. Good-by, Anne—good-by, home—good-by, good-by!"

And, crying softly, she dragged the battered suit case down the steps and out into the homeless night.

VI

In her rose and ivory bedroom in the Park Avenue house, Sylvia the supplanter was dressing for her appointment with Abner Cunningham. She was in the gayest spirits, singing in her clear, tingling voice:

"Oh, my little million, my pretty little million,
I love my million better than my beau!
I'll always be spending, I'll never be lending,
In the millionth heaven, where the good girls go!"

But her spirits did not interfere with her sagacity, and as she sang she studied her reflection critically.

"Not too gaudy, Sylvia, my darling," she admonished herself. "Remember you are dealing with a staid lawyer, who is not

as young as he used to be. At the same time, do not forget that all men are human. Restrained zip—that is the note!”

In accordance with this advice she left her room, a few minutes later, a very trim ensemble in brown, with a small wicked hat set only slightly askew, and a complexion that was gay but not riotous. In the lower hall she met Anne.

“Good morning, *chérie!*” she said blithely. She always breakfasted upstairs, and never met her hostess before luncheon, unless in some chance encounter like this. “Congratulate me! I go to keep tryst with Abner of the irresistible eyebrow.”

“I hope you’ll both have a merry time,” said Anne.

She spoke absently, her eyes searching Sylvia’s face with a sort of unhopeful hope.

“Why do you look at me like that?” demanded Sylvia petulantly. “You are always doing it nowadays, as if you expected a ghost to pop out of me somewhere. You make me nervous.”

“I’m sorry, Sylvia,” said Anne. “It did pop out once, and I’m always hoping it will again; but I didn’t mean to be a nuisance about it. I’m sorry, truly.”

Sylvia leaned forward with a pretty, impetuous gesture, and kissed her hostess lightly on the cheek.

“It is I who am sorry,” she said, “to be a crosspatch. I would I were full of bottled ghosts for your kind sake, my Anne.”

She smiled brightly over her shoulder as she turned to the door, and Anne’s sober face brightened in response. Sylvia was a past mistress of the art of smoothing over small roughnesses. She was far too clever to be unpleasant.

The car—which nowadays, thanks to these small and uncouth amenities, was more Sylvia’s car than Anne’s—was waiting for her at the door, and she was wafted smoothly and without effort down the broad avenues and through the narrow cross streets to the crowded business district. She watched, through the shining windows, the hurrying workaday world, the crowded traffic, the taxis dodging precariously in and out, the people standing submissively at the crossings waiting for her to pass.

“This is what it is to have a million dollars,” she thought. “To ride inside a crystal, cushioned world, and watch other people grubbing along in the dust outside—to honk them out of the way, and see them run! Oh, darling million dollars! Ex-

quisite million dollars! I would sell my heavenly halo—which I hold by such a very thin string, and which is so sure to be unbecoming, anyway—twenty times over for one sublime, divine, celestial million dollars!”

The offices of Cunningham & Frasier, attorneys at law, were congested with litigants of various descriptions; but Sylvia’s presence and name were potent enough to open without delay the well guarded door of the senior partner. Abner Cunningham himself met her on the threshold—where the office boy delivered her with a manner denuded of its professional brusquerie—and welcomed her with a perceptible gleam of pleasure.

“Punctual, I see,” he remarked. “That’s a valuable virtue—one your mother never had.”

“Dear Mr. Cunningham,” returned Sylvia, “for a million dollars I would be punctual on the operating table. Here I am, at your feet. Now tell me all about it, please.”

She seated herself in the not too easy visitor’s chair which flanked the broad desk, and fixed him with eager, sparkling eyes.

Abner Cunningham lowered himself more slowly into his swivel chair. He did not look as well as when she had last seen him, and his breathing began to suggest the difficulty that had exiled him from his old habitat; but his deeply recessed eyes had their accustomed shrewdness.

“Well, Miss Sylvia,” he began—“or I suppose I ought to say Mrs. Orloff—”

“No, no—call me Sylvia,” she breathed, with charming deference.

“Well, then, Miss Sylvia, I’ll go back to the beginning of this business. I knew your father very well. I also knew your mother very well; and it was because I did that I’m now in this position. To speak frankly, your father didn’t trust your mother. To speak still more frankly, he had good reason not to. I knew that, and he knew I did. There was—er—for a time there was—er—a breach between our families; but I won’t go into that—”

“The woman tempted you, I suppose,” interjected Sylvia, with her impishness.

“She did,” returned Abner Cunningham grimly; “but, as I say, we’ll skip that part. The breach was mended, *Humpty Dumpty* was put together again, and your father was good enough to say that he wouldn’t trust your fortune to anybody but me.

'My daughter Sylvia is the complete antithesis of her mother,' he said. 'She's straightforward, trusting, and unmercenary to a fault. I don't want this money to come to her until she's old enough to have a little worldly wisdom,' he said. 'I want her to have it when she's twenty-five. Until then I want it kept a complete secret. When I die,' he said, 'people are going to be surprised at the smallness of my estate; but this million is for nobody but Sylvia.'"

"Dear, dear father!" murmured Sylvia appreciatively.

"Well, I tied it up with all the precautions he wanted, and nobody ever got a hint of it until you did on your twenty-fifth birthday. Even then, as you know, you couldn't pick it up by just shaking the tree. You told me my partner wouldn't let you know the amount. Well, he didn't know it himself. Your father made me promise to keep the matter entirely in my own hands, and at this minute—the witnesses to the transaction both being dead—you and I are the only people on earth who know of it."

Sylvia's eyes shone like diamonds. The flush of her cheeks shamed her rouge.

"What a charming secret!" she exclaimed. "And it can still be all our own? Nobody else need know?"

The lawyer's one eyebrow rose a trifle.

"Why, that's as you wish," he said. "I should have thought your cousin—however, that's your own affair. No, nobody need know but yourself and your bankers."

"Bankers!" gloated Sylvia. "What a lovely word! Once upon a time I hated the thought of bankers; now I love them like hats. When may I take the money to the bankers, dear Mr. Cunningham? This instant?"

The lawyer chuckled, with a little noise that was dry but genial.

"Well, not exactly this instant, Miss Sylvia. There are formalities—the husks of an inheritance, you know." He took from a drawer a huge sheaf of papers in a brown folder. "Your father didn't just hand me a million dollar bills, and ask me to keep 'em in the teapot until you were twenty-five. There were investments to make, and securities to take care of. The money has appreciated, of course, and the increase had to be kept track of and invested. It's no joke to be nursemaid to a million dollars, as you'll soon find. I have to go over all these documents with you,

and get your signature to some of them, so you'd better make up your mind to stay a while. Takes time to collect money—even your own money."

"Well," said Sylvia gayly, "I cannot imagine a pleasanter *passe-temps*. Just show me how to do it."

"One thing first." The lawyer paused for a moment, whether from embarrassment or from the legal habit of impressiveness it was hard to tell. "Your father's wish in tying up this money so carefully was, as I think I've made plain, to keep it from your mother. He felt very strongly about that. He felt so strongly that he stipulated you were not to receive the money until you had had complied with a condition—a condition which I fear may cause you some difficulty."

He paused again, and this time he looked visibly uncomfortable. Sylvia leaned forward, tense with anxiety, the exuberant color draining away from her face.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried. "Tell me, tell me!"

"It is," said the lawyer slowly, "that you will sign a written promise—Miss Sylvia, you're not going to like this—not to give, make over, or in any way transfer any portion of your inheritance to your mother."

Sylvia sat quite still for a second, blinking. Then she leaned back in her chair with a bubbling laugh of rapturous relief.

"Is that all!" she exclaimed. "What a fright you gave me! I will promise that in ten languages, on any corner Bible you say. What a bad man, to frighten children with bogies!"

Abner Cunningham stared at her.

"But I thought—I understood," he said, surprised out of his legal immobility—"I was told you had impoverished yourself for your mother. My son says it's common talk among your friends that at your first chance you rushed off and gave her every penny you had."

"*Eh bien*, I have been cured of that disease!" said Sylvia, with a gay little shrug. "As the poet says, a mother is only a mother, but a million dollars is cash. Where do I sign?"

She stripped off her brown suede gloves. She was her brilliant self now, intoxicated with relief and joy. The lawyer studied her somberly.

"You're Sylvia's own daughter," he muttered, half to himself. "Maybe it's

just as well your father didn't live to see how mistaken he was." Then, rousing himself with a sigh, he opened a folded paper. "Read it through first," he said. "Never sign anything you haven't read. When you've finished, sign here."

Running her eye rapidly down the page, skipping the legal entanglements, Sylvia reached for a pen. She looked critically at its point, and tried it on a blank piece of paper.

"This is an important autograph," she said with a little nervous laugh, "and I must do it with *éclat*."

Then she began to write. After the fade of the moment, she was wearing half a dozen of the loose, narrow bracelets called "bangles," and they slipped down her wrist and impeded her.

"Nuisances!" she murmured.

She took them off and laid them on the desk.

Abner Cunningham glanced at them—abstractedly at first, then with attention. He leaned forward to stare at them, and picked one up.

"Where did you get this?" he asked.

Sylvia lifted her eyes briefly.

"It was my mother's," she said. "They were fashionable, the last time, when she was young."

She went on writing, making the strokes slowly and carefully like a child.

"Yes, she wore them," said Abner Cunningham. "A pretty hand she had."

His eyes moved, naturally, to Sylvia's hand from which the bracelets had come. This was a pretty hand, too—slender, fine-skinned, and exquisitely kept. He looked at it attentively, as an observant man endowed with good taste should look at so worthy an object. From the pink-nailed fingers, guiding the pen so carefully, he looked along the smooth back to the slender wrist. Then he gave a slight start.

At that moment Sylvia, finishing the last letter of her name, raised her head. She followed his fascinated gaze to her wrist, and her eyes narrowed. With a rapid movement she picked up the bracelets and slipped them on again.

The lawyer raised his eyes to hers. From beneath the overhanging brows they fixed her with a steady look.

"Why did you do that?" he asked.

"Force of habit," she answered nonchalantly. "I always wear them when I am not writing."

"You'll soon be writing again."

"Then I can take them off. They are not nailed on."

The two looked at each other for a moment of silence, his eyes piercing, hers brilliant and defiant.

"What if I ask you to take them off now?"

"I should refuse. You are not my costumer, that you should dictate the details of my *toilette*."

"What if I should take them off myself?" persisted Cunningham.

"Then I should scream for your subordinates. I thought—and they thought—that I was interviewing a lawyer, not a sneak thief."

Cunningham frowned impatiently, and transferred his gaze to the paper she had signed.

"Will you hand me that?"

"Certainly." She complied with a flash of triumph. "You will not be able to pick any flaws in it."

He studied the clear, firm signature—"Sylvia Schuyler Orloff."

"I have nothing to compare it with," he remarked.

"Get something, then," she retorted.

"Compare all you will—it will stand it. Enjoy yourself!"

"I intend to," he said. "Have you Sylvia Schuyler Orloff's marriage certificate with you?"

She opened her little hand bag and drew it out.

"Did you take me for a babe in diapers?" she asked triumphantly.

"I did not, madam. What other proofs of identity have you?"

Sylvia opened her eyes wide in a stare of superb arrogance.

"Sir, you are insulting. What other proofs do you want? You saw me at my cousin's house, accepted with the utmost warmth by her and by all my connection. You see here my legal certificate of marriage and my unchallengeable signature which I write under your own eyes. You have proof enough to satisfy the College of Skeptics."

"Nevertheless, I'm not satisfied. I intend to look into this further."

Instantly she sprang to her feet, flashing lightnings.

"Insolent!" she cried. "By what right do you dare to insult me? I demand an explanation!"

"You shall have it," said Abner Cunningham quietly. "Better sit down—it's quite a long story. Twenty-five years ago—thirty, thirty-five years ago, and longer than that, too—I had a friend. We were boys together, and went through school and college together. Then we both married. At first we were friends still; but the woman he married was a snake—a poison snake. She had to make a victim of every man she saw, and pretty soon she began on me. God knows I don't want to excuse myself; but that woman was a devil. She'd have corrupted the angel Gabriel. Well, when she had swallowed up my honor and my loyalty to my friend and my self-respect, she began on my pocketbook."

"Shame on you, liar!" ejaculated Sylvia. "Have you no decency? The woman you are lying about is my mother!"

He smiled grimly.

"It 'll be enlightening for you, then, to know what kind of a mother you come from. It may give you a useful warning. As I say, she turned to gold digging; and when she saw me beginning to open my eyes under that kind of attack, she showed her cleverness. She *was* clever—still is, probably. She told me I ought to make my wife a peace offering, and suggested a diamond bracelet. I got it, and she wanted to see it. I showed it to her, and she put it on. When she had admired it enough, I asked her to give it back. I was in a hurry to go and humble myself. Then she laughed at me. She told me that the stuff about my wife had been a joke, and that the bracelet was for her all along. I got into a rage, took hold of it, and tried to pull it off; and she—"

Sylvia, who had remained standing, tense and furious, throughout this narrative, turned on her heel and walked majestically to the door.

"I will not stay to hear my mother defamed," she said in an icy tone.

With a speed astonishing in one of his bulk and heaviness of movement, Abner Cunningham got out of his chair, strode across the room, and had his back to the door before she could reach it.

"You'll stay till I've finished," he said. "I took hold of the bracelet. She pulled away from me like a fury. We both turned savage, I yanking at the thing to get it off, she doubling her wrist and holding on to it like grim death—until suddenly the diamonds turned red. We had pulled so hard

that the edge—it had a square, sharp edge—had cut her wrist. The red diamonds brought me to my senses. I wouldn't touch the thing again, and I've never liked diamonds since. She may have it yet. I don't know about that, and I don't care; but I do know that she'll carry a narrow white scar on her wrist until she dies. And that's why, Mrs. Sylvia Schuyler Orloff, I must request you to take off those bangles, or dangles, or whatever you call 'em."

Sylvia's eyes blazed at him.

"I will not listen to your insults!" she cried. "I demand that you give me my inheritance and let me go!"

"We'll talk about that," said Abner Cunningham imperturbably, "when you've taken off your dangles."

"Suppose I refuse?"

"Then we'll talk about it some other day, when I've had time for a few—er—formalities."

They stood and measured each other, the man calm and steely, the woman flaming with suppressed fury. The pause was galvanic with cross currents of emotion. Sylvia broke it.

"Let me out!" she said at last, in a strangled voice.

"With pleasure," said Abner Cunningham, stepping aside. "Come again in about two weeks, and we'll see where we stand. You're just as beautiful as ever, Sylvia, if that's any satisfaction to you."

"*Sale bête!*" exploded Sylvia, flinging past him.

All the way home, in the borrowed luxury of Anne's car, the chink of the uncaught million rattled mockingly in her ear.

VII

SYLVIA the outcast trudged on weary feet back to her table, and set down her tray again. This was the third time she had filled the same order, and her customer—an elongated dame with a small, snuffy nose—still viewed her efforts without enthusiasm.

"Do you call *that* toast?" asked the customer, pointing with a misprizing finger at the neat brown rectangles which Sylvia had disposed so seductively. "Looks like tiles to me!"

"The last time, madam," defended Sylvia, "you said it was too soft."

"I did. I said it looked like a flaxseed poultice; but that didn't mean I wanted to chip my teeth on it. Take it away!"

"I'm sure, madam, you'd find it really very nice—"

"Take it *away*, I tell you! I'm through with this place. I'd as soon have my tea in a sausage factory!"

The elongated dame rose with waspish grandeur—dropping her napkin and the menu card on the floor, for Sylvia to pick up—and wisped haughtily out of the door.

"Miss Smith!" said the suppressed but penetrating voice of the lady manager, above Sylvia's head.

The new waitress jumped. The lady manager had rubber heels and swivel eyes, and was *au courant* of events to an extent that was almost uncanny.

"Yes, Miss Weissmann," replied Sylvia, straightening her tired back.

"Why did that customer leave?"

"She wasn't satisfied. I got her toast three times."

"Did she pay for any of it?"

"No, Miss Weissmann."

"Then you had no business to let her get out. What d'you think you're here for, Miss Smith—an entertainer? I told you when I hired you that you'd got to show something besides good looks, if you wanted to stick; and I'm still waiting to be shown. The first day you broke a tray of dishes, the second day you forgot an order, and to-day you let a customer get away. If you're in this for society life, we're not; and unless you take a brace, you won't be here long!"

The lady manager moved snappily away. Sylvia tidied her table again, picked up her tray, and trudged once more to the kitchen with the condemned toast. Though she was so tired that she almost hoped she *would* lose her job, she was panic-stricken at the possibility. She could not claim her home with Anne until she knew definitely what the other Sylvia wanted of it. Meanwhile, being almost literally penniless, she must work if she wished to eat; and no other post, of the few open to her inexperience, could possibly fit her needs so well.

"Ye Topaz Tea Shoppe" had been washed by the mounting tide of commerce into the center of what used in her childhood to be aristocratic seclusion, and its windows commanded the very doorstep of Anne's house. Hovering unhappily in the vicinage, an unwilling but *ex necessitate* spy, she had seen the sign "Waitress wanted" between its æsthetic orange curtains, and she had hailed it as a direct beam from

her guiding star. To lose its palatable food and its invaluable vantage ground of observation would be an appalling disaster to her now.

By good luck she had been assigned to a table near the window; and here, in the intervals of memorizing the gastronomic whims of her customers, whose likeness was so confusing, whose difference so sacred—"creamed eggs, mashed potatoes, peas, tea with cream—*poached* eggs, *creamed* potatoes, *beans*, tea with *lemon*"—and of dodging the swinging kitchen door that was always waiting to knock the tray out of her hands again, she kept an anxious watch for the people who filled her thoughts.

She saw them, too. Every little while they leaped out at her, incredibly significant, from among the nonentities who filled the street. Anne she saw, brisk and busy, nearly always afoot; the other Sylvia, seductive as Circe, riding queenly by in a big dark blue car; Jerry, spruce and attractive, but not so debonair as of old; and once, with an almost unendurable up-leap and down-plunge of the heart, her Keith.

She paid no attention to the rest of the people who went into Anne's door or came out of it, for—judging the other Sylvia by herself, as she could never get over doing—she was sure that the magnet was one of those she loved best. Anne being eliminated, she hovered with torturing anxiety between the two men. When she permitted herself to hope that it was Jerry, the thought of dear Anne would come rebukingly and make her feel like a brute. When she was sure it must be Keith, the death knell rang within her.

After the waspish lady had gone, Sylvia's table stood empty for a little while, and as quickly and unobtrusively as she could she took her place by the window. This hour of late afternoon she had found to be the most fruitful period for observation. In the morning there was little evidence of the people in whom she was interested, and after night fell she could see them only in glimpses; but around tea time they were always coming and going—usually going home, for they all liked tea by Anne's fire.

Anne had gone out with her skates early in the afternoon. Sylvia was out in the car. A couple of men had already gone up the steps to the house, and were probably waiting inside for the hostess's return. If one of them were Keith—if the other Sylvia were hurrying home to him—

"Miss Smith!" said the sharp *sotto voce* of Miss Weissmann, in her ear—Sylvia jumping, as usual. "If you haven't anything to do, you can go in the kitchen and help make sandwiches. I didn't engage you for window dressing!"

Sylvia turned away, dismayed, for this was just the moment for something of vital interest to happen; but before she had reached the swing door the manager hissed at her again:

"Miss Smith! You needn't go now. Customers for your table!"

Sylvia turned back, to go and stand unobtrusively but usefully at her post, as she had been taught to do. She took a step, and at the same time a glance; and then she froze into a statue of consternation, and stood transfixed. Customers had indeed come in, and were being elegantly waited to her table by the manager; and the customers were Jerry Thorne and the other Sylvia.

She must hide again. There was nothing else for it. A ghost cannot afford to take the center of the stage. She looked swiftly about. "Ye Topaz Tea Shoppe" was too æsthetic to have anything so crude as a cashier; but money indubitably circulated there, and there was indubitably a blond female functionary in a sort of curtained confessional, who made change and kept a searching eye on the waitresses' checks. To her Sylvia hurried, turning her back on the newcomers, and skirting the room with all the speed she dared venture.

"Gladys!" she whispered, standing behind the confessional. "Oh, Gladys, help me out! There are some people at my table, and I *can't* wait on them—I'm not well—I must sit down. Change places with me, Gladys, that's a dear—quick!"

The blond young lady was a good sort, and a warm admirer of Sylvia's.

"Sure I will," she said. "I s'pose Weissmann 'll tan me, but I don't care. Gets your feet sore, standin', don't it? When I had your job, I thought my corns 'd kill me. Right inside, deary!"

The employees of "Ye Topaz Tea Shoppe" were all dressed alike in pseudo-eighteenth-century frocks of brown poplin with yellow pipings—except the cook, who, living in seclusion, went in for modern effects in black percale; so Sylvia, to effect a passable alibi, had only to transfer her frilled yellow apron and cap to her substitute. She slipped into the cubicle and

closed the door, while Miss Weissmann, all suavity, was pressing the menu card upon the newcomers; and Gladys took her stand beside them while the manager was still too rapt in appreciation of their quality to observe their servitor.

It was not until the other Sylvia raised her head to give the order, and Miss Weissmann got a first comprehensive view of her face, that the manager perceived an element of strangeness in the situation. She started, looked for Sylvia, found Gladys, opened her mouth, and closed it again. Then she retired to her sentinel post in the rear of the room to bide her time—too much a manager to make a scene before good customers, too much a lady to let such a remarkably piquant situation pass without subsequent investigation.

Sylvia had no time to worry about the manager's reactions. Secure in the shadow of her cubicle, she projected herself passionately into the scene at the tea table. As soon as Gladys had borne her intricate blond curls kitchenward, the other Sylvia and Jerry had begun to talk. Their table was only a few feet away, and though their voices were low, to the new cashier's quick ear and intense sympathy all they said was distinctly audible. She listened unashamed. On the tone of this conversation, perhaps, hung her future, Anne's future; and Jerry's future, and its importance transcended good breeding.

"If you'd tell me what you want," Jerry was saying in an exasperated tone, "maybe I could do it; but as it is, it would take two mediums with ten controls apiece to suit you. You'll go to a *matinée*, you'll go to the Flower Show, you'll go to a reception, you'll go home. You tell the man to drive ten different ways, and then you walk. You'll have tea at the Plaza, at the Bachelors', at Anne's, you don't want any tea at all, and then you haul me into this female dump. Now you're here, I suppose you don't like it; and in about a minute I suppose you'll be telling me it's my fault."

The other Sylvia impatiently stripped off her gloves and flung them on the table.

"It is your fault, Jerree. You cannot seem to do the least little thing to please me. In Europe a man is gallant, he is obliging, he knows a woman's mind by the flicker of an eyelash. Here he is selfish, swallowed up in business. He is a bear with his head in a molasses barrel. I am sick of American men!"

"You seem to tolerate 'em without much agony," growled Jerry. "You're verminous with 'em."

"Jerree, you are revolting! Talk nicely, or not at all."

"Well, when I keep my temper, you say I'm a sap. I am, too, to let you use me for a dry mop the way you've been doing. I can't make you out, Sylvia. You didn't use to be like this. It used to be 'charming Jerry,' 'amusing Jerry'—you had me riding on the merry-go-round all the time. What have I done to get kicked off?"

She shrugged.

"Ask yourself, Jerree. Why have you ceased to be charming, amusing? Why have you become ill-tempered, dull, *ennuyant*? In four days you have not made me laugh once. You are as afflicting as a great-great-aunt."

"For cramp's sake, Sylvia, how can you expect a chap to be amusing when you're in a grouch like this? I'm not a professional clown, trained to be funny in the dentist's chair. If you can't hand me a smile, I can't hand you a laugh. I tell you straight, I'm damned if I'm going to play balloon for you, and dance every time you swat. I'm through!"

Usually, as Sylvia in hiding well knew, such a pronouncement would have given the signal for pretty coaxings and cajolings, for murmurs of penitence and light caressing touches, for all the subtle arts that bring a rebellious lover back to heel; but for once Sylvia the enchantress failed to rise to the occasion.

"*Eh bien! N'importe*," she murmured petulantly, and turned away with a bored and weary air.

Gladys now supervening with the tea, a sulky silence fell.

Sylvia the outcast leaned back in her chair, and drew a deep breath. One thing was clear to her—the other Sylvia was not staying for Jerry. This was not the cat-and-mouse, let-him-go-and-catch-him-again technique that she used on a man in whom she was really interested. It was genuine indifference. Yet she would never be so out of temper, or so ready to let an attractive man escape her toils, if she were not distracted by some other acute interest. She wanted something very much, and had not yet got it.

Sylvia was torn between gladness and misery. After an affair so intense and a disillusionment so poignant, she thought it

almost certain that Jerry would turn to Anne, his confidante and comforter; and with her trained will and conscious principles she rejoiced. But if the supplanter's lodestone was not Jerry, it must be Keith; and all the listener's real, unconscious, uninhibited self was agonized by the thought.

Gladys hovered fascinatedly over the tea party. The remarkable likeness had not escaped her, either, and in her scheme of life—born of a natural love of excitement, and fed on motion pictures—the bizarre and potentially romantic loomed large. The conversation, therefore, became a cool crust of banality over a warm welter of temper.

The other Sylvia asked Jerry if he would have more hot water, and he replied that he had had enough for one day. He remarked that the bread was too fresh, and she murmured, with a droop of the eyelids, that it was in congenial company. She thought she would go to the Flower Show to-morrow, and he expected that his business would call him to the part of the city that was farthest from flowers.

Gladys inhaled this well bred bad breeding with rapture. Sylvia, from her curtailed niche, contemplated it with a heavy heart of foreboding.

When they had finished their tea and left the sympathetic Gladys beaming over her tip, the two passed the cubicle on their way out. Jerry having hung his overcoat near the door, they stood almost within hand's reach of Sylvia while he put it on. They began to talk again, and their voices and inflections were as intimately hers as if she had been part of the conversation.

"Well," Jerry muttered grimly, "this afternoon hasn't been a screaming success, has it? Who gets to-night?"

"Keith," answered the other Sylvia.

She stood, buttoned and gloved, watching him struggle into his coat, with the patient pose of waiting which is so maddening to the one waited for.

"H-m!" grunted Jerry. "Going to dance?"

"No, we are going to the cinema, like the chambermaids and chauffeurs. There is a picture called 'Fatal Flowers' which he earnestly desires me to see."

"I know why. That's a fillum he thinks will do you good. Hope it does!"

"I thank you. Perhaps it would also benefit you. If you feel that it would, I will get him to take you along. We are going at eight."

"Thank you—I've seen it. Also—if you don't mind—I've seen enough of you while you're like this. I hope, for his sake, you get a change of heart, or shoes, or whatever it is makes your disposition, before night."

"Do not worry about him, or me either. If you must worry, *mon cher*, worry about yourself. Then you will at least be attending to your own business."

They went out, still squabbling: and Sylvia sat back in the booth with a quickened pulse. That evening the other Sylvia and Keith were going to the motion pictures. They would be together in a public place, where anybody might see them. It was her chance. She must go and watch them together, and find out what they were to each other. Distasteful and degrading as was this job of the spying ghost, she must finish it before she could either come back to life or go away into oblivion.

"Well, my Gawd!" said Gladys, at the window of the booth. "Whaddaya know about that? Say, I always thought there was somethin' fishy about you, Sylvia! What are you—the Lost Dolphin?"

"Oh, no!" Sylvia laughed nervously. "Just an ordinary girl that has to earn a living. Thanks a lot, Gladys. I'm better now, and I must get back before Miss Weissmann jumps on me."

"You can't do it," murmured Gladys. "Here she is now, two jumps ahead o' you. Gee, kid, I'm glad I got in on this!"

Sylvia shrank back as the manager slithered rapidly up to her, for she thought her time had surely come; but now, to her surprise, Miss Weissmann was all smiles and suavity.

"Aha, Miss Smith!" she said archly. "Playing a little trick on us, hey? I knew, when I saw that lady and saw you hiding, something was up. Who is she—your sister?"

"She's a—a relative," stammered Sylvia. "I should say she was—all of that. Well, deary, you can have your little joke, and tell me the point when you get good and ready. Only thing I ask is, if it gets in the papers, you'll give us a good send-off, see? Is there anything you'd like, Miss Smith? A little shorter hours, maybe?"

Sylvia drew a long breath of relief.

"Well," she said, taking her courage in both hands, "I *should* like to get off a few minutes early to-night, Miss Weissmann, if you don't mind."

"Surely, surely!" the manager replied

affably. "Any time you say. Are you—er—going out in society, Miss Smith? To the opera, or a reception?"

"I'm going to the movies," said Sylvia.

There was no difficulty about finding the trysting place. "Fatal Flowers" was well advertised, and Sylvia had only to glance at the newspaper to locate it in the largest and most lordly of all the city's picture palaces. She went through her dinner duty in a fever of hidden excitement, her thoughts running ahead with an impatience that was half hope and half intolerable dread. In three hours—two hours—one hour—she would know what was more vital to her than anything else in the world. She had to clutch her tray until her fingers whitened to keep from dropping it.

It was imperative that she should be at the theater before the other two arrived, so she had no time to go back to her rooming house; but in a city where raiment is chiefly contrived to smite the eye the old dark coat in which she came to work was the best concealment she could have contrived. When she had stopped at a little open-all-evening shop on Madison Avenue, bought a thick black veil, and pinned it around her small hat, she was probably as inconspicuous a beauty as went to the movies that night in the entire Western Hemisphere.

She took her stand on the pavement beside the great bright theater, and watched the people stream in—noisy people, quiet people, gay people, dull people—people, people, people. At last, when she thought all the people in New York must be inside, and her knees were ready to give way with fatigue and nervousness, a taxi drew up in front of the door, and the two for whom she was waiting got out.

Keith came first, tall and dark and lean and clean and oh, so dear! Her heart almost suffocated her. It tried to jump straight out of her mouth and fly to him; but she swallowed it, and determinedly stood still. Then the other Sylvia emerged, exquisite in dark velvet and fur, and paused a moment on the pavement, looking disappearingly at the brilliant amusement ground of *hoi polloi*. The two women faced each other a few feet apart—the usurper queenly and vivid and so dominant that she arrested the eye of every passer, the rightful heir about as noticeable as a hydrant.

"It's a queer world," thought Sylvia.

Keith took tickets at the box office, and he and the other Sylvia went in. Sylvia, who had bought her ticket before they came, followed them close.

The huge place was nearly full, and the news film was going on; but an usher in the costume of a deposed Russian potentate wafted them to a couple of empty rows at the rear, and Keith and the other Sylvia took the seats nearer to the front. Keith stood back, for his lady to go in; but she, looking about with increased disapproval, and sniffing delicately, motioned him to go in first.

"I do not like crowded humanity," she murmured. "I may decide to leave, and then I wish to be able to leave quickly."

So, evidently thinking it not worth an argument, he sat down in the inner seat, and she took the one on the aisle.

Sylvia the ghost slipped quietly in behind them. She breathed easier when she had got thus far. For her distressful purpose, her position was the best that could be imagined. She had expected to have to sit at some little distance and patch together what she could from chance glimpses, but here she was within touch and hearing of her quarry, and, being in the back row, she could keep her hat, her veil, and her anonymity secure.

She sat very still, all her faculties centered on the two in front of her, and on their relation to each other and to her. Inclosed in darkness and distant music, the three seemed set apart in a world of their own—a world from which one of them must shortly vanish.

Sylvia's hands were pressed tight together with the tension of her spirit. Her path and the other Sylvia's had never crossed without her paying a heavy toll, and this bade fair to be the most extortionate crossing of all; yet even now she could not hate her supplanter. There was ingrained in her a stubborn loyalty as deep as the roots of life itself.

On the screen an airplane was busily bombing a defunct battleship. Sylvia the supplanter watched it with bored indifference, while Keith watched her with eagerness, and Sylvia behind them watched Keith with hunger. Waves of feeling, ardors of love and yearning, passed through their human conduit and beat upon the screen until you might have expected it to shiver as the battleship did under the bombs; but it remained impassive.

The airplane gave way to the world's tennis champion, and he to General Pershing reviewing Peruvian cadets, and he in turn to "Cat Adopts Motherless Chickens"—or "Hen Adopts Motherless Kittens," Sylvia could never have said which. Then the news of the world was told, and the "Fatal Flowers" began to bloom.

The story of this picture was not one to revolutionize dramatic tradition. It dealt with a girl who, coming sweet and pure from a convent, entered the modern social whirl, became addicted to wine, man, and song, and moved briskly from bad to worse, until forsaken by all that in youth she held dear. Total loss of God, man, and bank account was foreshadowed in the near future; but this was followed by sackcloth and reversion to early principles about the fourth reel, and the arms of a good man at the curtain. Charm and a specious novelty were lent by the employment of a French background, and the cleverly arranged music added a strong appeal; but Sylvia, watching the increasing restlessness of her beautiful double, was constrained to smile.

"Keith, you darling old simpleton!" she thought. "You certainly are a subtle suggester! You'd probably have gone far in diplomacy!"

Presently the other Sylvia turned indignantly to her escort.

"My dear Keith," she whispered, "will you kindly tell me why the devil you brought me here?"

"Because I wanted you to see it, Sylvia."

"And why in the world should I want to see it?"

"I thought you'd enjoy it. I thought the French background—"

"French background, *ma tante!* The thing was photographed somewhere outside of Yaphank. To think that for this stupidity I cut short my dinner and refrained from wearing my new evening gown! Is it all like this?"

"No—it gets better and better. Be patient, Sylvia darling, and watch it. Please, Sylvia—for me!"

Keith was very appealing in his earnestness and ardor, and she gave him a relenting, indulgent smile.

"*Eh bien*, a little while, for you. You see? I do a great deal for you."

"Oh, Sylvia—if only you would do what I want!" murmured Keith, in a hungry undertone.

She silenced him with a gesture, and turned back to the screen. Sylvia, hidden in the shadows, felt her heart grow hot and cold—hot with anger, cold with fear. How the other woman used him—him the rare, the precious, the tender and true—playing with him for her pleasure, pushing him about for her convenience! How sure she was of herself and him! How he loved her—and how Sylvia, Sylvia the outcast, loved him! Was it the new Sylvia, the supplanter, that he loved, or his memory of an earlier love embodied in her?

The picture moved steadily on its appointed way. By one of those marvelous coincidences of which life is so full, the beautiful heroine, egregiously under the influence of strong drink, was confronted with the mother superior of her girlhood convent, and a flash-back of her innocent youth passed before her anguished eyes. Horror and remorse began to work violently in her.

Sylvia the supplanter turned to Keith with increased indignation.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she whispered. "How much more is there of this *émétique*?"

"Don't you like it at all, Sylvia?"

"Like it! I am afflicted beyond endurance by it. Why did you bring me?"

"I told you—I wanted you to see it, Sylvia."

"You thought it would do me good—is that it?"

"We-ell, I did think it might point out a few things to you—yes."

"Oh, you are insufferable! I would as soon spend a social evening with John the Baptist. I am going home!"

"Oh, don't, Sylvia! Please, dear, don't go! You'll like the mountain part—in the Pyrenees, you know—high, wild. It comes quite soon. Wait till you see that mountain sunrise. It's inspiring."

"I need inspiration, if I am to endure this! *Ciel*, but it is desolating! I warn you, if it does not improve in five minutes, it may go to the devil, and I will go home."

"But the music, Sylvia—hark, they're playing that Chopin nocturne you used to play to me—"

She cut him off with an impatient movement, and shrugged back to the picture. Sylvia in the shadow was indignant, and at the same time tingling with happiness. That nocturne—the second, the one that used to be Keith's best beloved—had been running thrilling fingers along her nerves,

and she had been wondering if he had forgotten. It was she, then, at least as much as the other one, whom he loved.

The picture, climbing into the mountains, now looked to her beautiful beyond words. The music was like the choring of the young-eyed cherubim; but the moral climbed with the mountains, and repentance rose with the sun.

The other Sylvia suddenly began tugging at her coat.

"Move your arm from my sleeve!" she muttered in a furious undertone. "I am going!"

"Sylvia, please! I want you to see the end."

"And I tell you nothing will induce me to see it! I have had all I can bear. *Dieu*, is it not enough that you preach at me yourself every time we meet, without also training the monitor of the flappers and the servant maids on me? I do not wonder that Salome asked for the head of John the Baptist. Give me my coat!"

"If you'd only wait five minutes—"

"Will you release my coat, or must I go without it?"

"Very well—here it is. When I get mine on, I can help you better."

"I do not want your help, or you. I have had enough of both for one night. I am going alone!"

By now she had worked herself into a thoroughgoing temper; and apparently Keith had had enough experience in her moods to know that it was futile to oppose her. He looked at her with tormented eyes of love and disappointment and hope once again frustrated; but he said only—

"You aren't afraid?"

"I am afraid of nothing so much as the deadly boredom, the stupefying dreariness, of another hour with you. Good night!"

"Good night, Sylvia," returned Keith quietly.

He rose as she did, and stood while she whisked furiously into her wrap and out into the aisle. When she had vanished beyond the screen he sat down again, with a deep sigh.

Sylvia, leaning forward, saw how he stared unseeingly at the screen, and how somber were his eyes. She saw, too, how his hand clenched on his knee, and how he looked, even in this dim light, like the tired father of the boy who had been her lover. Whether he loved the other Sylvia or not, he was not happy.

Suddenly she could not stand it. There he sat, alone and hungry, the empty seat beside him; and there was she, alone and hungry, too, and secure in the shadow and the thick veil. There could be no disloyalty to any one—and oh, the comfort!—in snatching a moment's nearness. She slipped swiftly out of her chair, and silently into the chair beside him.

Absorbed in his gloomy thoughts, he did not notice her. She sat as still as the chair itself, oppressed by his unhappiness, yet ecstatic with the joy of his presence. The orchestra was still playing Chopin—the "Raindrops" nocturne now, which she had often played to him in the old days. It carried her back to Anne's morning room, and firelight, and peace—the delicious, unrestful peace of undeclared love.

It carried him back, too. She heard him sigh again, and saw the clenched hand on his knee unclasp. Fine filaments, delicate and intangible currents, flowed from the music into both of them, from each of them into the other. Sylvia knew that he was thinking of her, even as she was of him, with love and with longing. She moved—the smallest, quietest movement, so that her shoulder touched his; and she felt how his own relaxed against her, and how she slipped comfortingly into his dream.

For a long time they sat like this, their bodies touching, their thoughts deeply interwoven, yet each to all outward seeming a stranger to the other. The picture went on. The heroine agonized, repented, reformed, and was rewarded. The strings played soft melodies, old melodies, dear melodies. Solace enveloped the lonely lovers quietly, surely.

Then the end came. The moving figures faded from the screen, the orchestra gave place to the sonorous organ, and the people began to wriggle into their overcoats and go. Keith stirred, and, with a sigh, came back to reality; but even now he did not look toward Sylvia, supposing nobody to be beside him but his dream.

Sylvia knew that the time had come for the ghost to fade again into oblivion, and she was ready—as ready as a person ever can be to exchange paradise for purgatory. She had no preparations to make for departure, and she meant simply to slip away as quietly as she had come, giving no sign; but when she meant this, she meant a little more than a woman very much in love has a right to expect of herself.

Just at the moment when she should have carried out her excellent intention she imperiled it still further by looking at her lover. He was sitting still, loath to banish his dream by moving, and his hand lay empty and lonely on his knee. With a mad, irresistible impulse, Sylvia pulled off her loose glove and slipped her fingers, warm and human, inside his.

"Keith, I love you!" she whispered.

Keith started like a man shot.

"Sylvia!" he exclaimed, whirling toward her. "You!"

However, she had not lost her head entirely. She had drawn her hand away the instant it had given its message, and was already on her feet in the aisle, mingling with the outgoing audience. The movement of the crowd, the low lights, the dark veil, hid her from him completely. She threaded her way to a side door as fast as she could, and, pausing for one backward glance, saw him still searching the throng with bewildered eyes. Then she ran out through the foyer, out of the wide entrance, and into the street, like *Cinderella* fleeing a little behind schedule from the ball.

But, like *Cinderella*, she knew that she had left her slipper behind her.

VIII

THE night was long at the rooming house—not because of the rattle of the elevated railway, or the groan of the trolley cars, or the lumps in the mattress, but because of the thoughts that went marching, marching through Sylvia's head—marching, wheeling, realigning, and marching back again.

Keith still loved her. She still loved Keith, and more than ever. Keith wanted, or thought he wanted, the other Sylvia. The other Sylvia must of course want Keith, for nobody could help wanting him; but could they find any happiness together? Was it right, was it really fair to either, to let them go on to almost certain misery?

On the other hand, if there was even a chance for them to be happy, could Sylvia clear herself of the charge of self-seeking if she interfered? And if she should interfere, and snatch happiness for herself, could she ever enjoy it when she knew she might have stolen it from the other one?

One o'clock—two o'clock—three o'clock—four.

She arrived at "Ye Topaz Tea Shoppe" jaded and pale, but she looked very beau-

tiful, for her beauty was of the clear-skinned, spiritual type that is made only the more appealing by a touch of wanness. Miss Weissmann glanced at the bluish rings beneath her eyes with admiring interest.

"You look like you were out late," the lady manager remarked. "I'll bet, if the truth was told, you went to more than movies! Ever have your picture in the paper?"

Sylvia colored suddenly, remembering the dreadful time of her marriage to Boris, and how the Viennese newspapers had pictured her as "the most beautiful Russian princess that ever came out of America." Gladys, who was now so much absorbed in contemplation of her romantic colleague that she was hardly able to make change, stuck her head out of her box with an ecstatic expression.

"Gee, kid!" she said. "If you'd only fix up the little old map a bit, you'd have the other one knocked cold! Stop by at Wooly's on the way home, and get a lip stick and a box of this here Jewnesse rouge, and you'll make Mary Pickford look like a fried egg!"

The day dragged wearily by. Customers were many, trays were heavy, and the orders were more confusing than ever. The air was close, and smelled of mayonnaise. Sylvia saw none of the people with whom her fate was involved, except once, in the morning, Anne. Her head ached, and she had less and less perception of what she ought to do. By late afternoon she felt so tired and ill that nothing but pride kept her from begging off and going home.

There came, as there always did between tea and dinner, a pause in the day's activities, when all the tables were either empty or tenanted by people who were at the last-bite-and-sip stage. Having nothing to do, and lacking even sufficient enterprise to look out of the window, Sylvia was leaning wearily against the wall and going over her problem for the thousandth time, when Miss Weissmann came hurrying up.

That eagle-eyed functionary, whom nothing escaped, was alert with suppressed excitement.

"Miss Smith," she said, "your—your—relation's just going by. She came out of the Schuyler house, across the street. I thought you might like to speak to her."

Sylvia started. After all, why not? She would get nowhere, trudging this weary treadmill of speculation by herself. Why

not confront the other Sylvia, and find out where they all stood?

She caught her breath and met Miss Weissmann's animation with an answering spark.

"Thank you—thank you, Miss Weissmann, I should!" she exclaimed. "Which way is she going? I'll catch up with her."

She was already on her way to the little cloak room where the waitresses kept their wraps, taking off her cap and apron as she went.

"Down town, deary," replied Miss Weissmann, with her new geniality. "Don't hurry back. We'll manage about your dinner duty if you're a little late."

Sylvia thanked her with a smile, flung on her hat and coat, and hurried out. A little way down the block she could see the slender, beautifully borne person of the other Sylvia strolling leisurely along. Without pausing for reflection, she sped after it. Excitement had banished her fatigue. It was an enormous relief to be doing something—anything. Whatever she learned from this interview, she would be better off after it than in the numbing fog of uncertainty which now oppressed her.

So absorbed was she in her intention that—with an oversight most unusual in her—she completely forgot to enter into the state of mind of the party of the second part. As she neared the corner, her one thought was to make sure of her quarry before the width of the cross street could separate them. She took the last few steps in a run, and called out in her low, clear, carrying voice:

"Sylvia!"

The other Sylvia started and glanced over her shoulder. Then she turned about and stopped still. The life drained slowly out of her face—not only the blood, but even the expression. Blank like a mask, her lips parted, her eyes distended, her cheeks blanched, she stood staring. A little strangled sound came to her opened lips and died unborn.

Sylvia, remembering that she was no more than a ghost, and contrite at having walked without warning, made haste to offer reassurance.

"It's really I," she said. "Don't be frightened, Sylvia—I'm alive!"

She took the other's cold hand in her warm fingers. The supplanter gave an uncontrollable shudder at the touch; but, sensing its vitality, she relaxed a little.

"It is you?" she said hoarsely. "It is you yourself?"

"I myself. Let's go somewhere for a few explanations. We can't talk here."

Looking about, she found near at hand one of those wide-doored office buildings whose lobbies give a catholic hospitality to any foot that crosses their threshold; and at once she led the way inside it. Except for an occasional home-goer issuing from the elevator, the place was deserted. She saw at the rear a sort of niche formed by the angle of two closed doors. Going to it, she turned and confronted her prototype.

Years of experience in traveling on thin ice, in rapid recovery after dangerous slips, had trained the other Sylvia well. Already she had herself in hand. Her breath came fast, and it was easy to see that alarm of another sort had succeeded her first terror; but her poise had returned, and she was equal to the occasion. Indeed, she was the more debonair of the two.

"*Eh bien!*" she said. "So you are really here! How does that happen?"

"I got away from Assuat, and the French government gathered the refugees together and sent us to Paris. I wrote to Vienna in search of you—to the house, to the bank, to the prefecture—and couldn't find you."

"No—I had fled. You see, after I received the word of your death, I was completely at a loss—heartbroken, of course—desolated—and I felt I could endure Vienna no longer, especially as Adolph was growing more tiresome day by day. Then your cousin wrote inviting me for a visit, and I thought, 'Here are two sorrowful souls, bound together by a common loss; I will seek comfort with her.'"

"You seem to have found it," suggested Sylvia dryly, glancing at the other's smart frock and devilish little hat.

"Oh, my dear, this is but raiment—an outward show, a disguise. Within I have been so disconsolate, there are not words to tell it. I say to the kind Anne every day—I say—"

"Oh, don't bother to think it up!" said Sylvia. "It isn't worth while. I've been there."

The other Sylvia recoiled a step, and panic flashed vividly across her face.

"You have been there!" she gasped. "When?"

"Last Monday—the day I came home."

"And what—what did you—do?"

"You can see. I found you in my place, using my name and my room and my welcome; and I came away. I've stayed away ever since."

The other Sylvia lighted with relief, which warmed swiftly into radiance.

"Oh, *mignonne!*" she cried. "What a treasure you are—always my good angel! *Chérie*, I appreciate it. I thank you!"

With one of her impetuous movements she leaned forward and kissed her good angel charmingly on the cheek.

Sylvia drew back, stiffening. The time was past when this facile, skillful charm could sway her.

"I didn't say I was going to *stay* away," she said coldly. "Why should I?"

"Why, indeed, darling? But at the same time, why should you want to come back? If you knew how dull it was, there alone with the healthy, upright Anne! You are so *intriguée* with independence, you love so much to stand on your own feet—"

"I don't love wearing them out; and I want Anne, I want home. Besides—there's Keith!"

The other Sylvia made a pretty, disparaging gesture.

"Oh, Keith! Poor Keith, he is a *Hamlet* who has just got religion. You are welcome to the dismal, the improving Keith. Take him!"

"How can I," demanded Sylvia, with a flash of anger, "when you have my place and my—self? To have Keith, to have any life of my own at all, I must come back; and I think I will!"

The features of the other Sylvia sharpened with alarm.

"No, no!" she cried. "Not yet! Oh, Sylvia, *ma mie*, do not come yet!"

"Why not?" asked Sylvia, looking at her searchingly. "What is it you want?"

"Oh, I am tired, darling, so tired—from the anxiety about you, from the foolish frivolous life I used to lead. I want to rest a little—just a little longer—in the peace and innocence of that dear home."

"Rubbish!" said Sylvia impatiently. "What are you really after? Tell me the truth."

The other Sylvia thought briefly.

"Very well, I will. I did not like to, *chérie*, because you are so high-minded, so uncharitable to my little follies; but I will tell you all, and you will understand and forgive. There is a man—a solid, depend-

able man this time, rich as Rothschild, and really quite nice, too. In a little while I shall have him tighter than a new shoe; but he is not yet ready to put on. Give me a month—give me even two weeks—and I will carry him off, and leave you a clear field."

"What about Adolph?"

"Ah, *what* about Adolph? What do I want with Adolph? A stupid, ill-natured, insolvent, deflated balloon—I throw him in the river!" exclaimed the other Sylvia superbly. "And besides," she added, with a practical afterthought, "I heard that when he married me he already had a wife in Prague."

"I wish I knew whether you were telling the truth," reflected Sylvia. "If you are, there's no reason why I shouldn't come. You can always get a man if you want him."

"Oh, but not this man! Oh, *chérie*, *mignonne*, *allerliebste*, give me just a little time—just two weeks! Dear one, you shall have all eternity, if you will let me have two little weeks! Oh, you have always been so good to me!" Her beautiful face crumpled up suddenly in a passion of weeping; and now for the first time she ceased to look young, clouds of years and panic and despair blotting her out entirely. "Darling, oh, for *you* to ruin me!—you who have saved me so many times!" she wept.

This was the one tug that Sylvia could never resist—weakness, helplessness, and the appeal to past debts, so much more potent than any reminder of benefits. She had indeed been generous so many times; could she stop now? And the tears, the despair—surely, in spite of what the supplanter had just said of him, they pointed to Keith. There was nothing in the world worth despairing for but Keith; and could she, who knew so well what that hunger was, deny it?

"Sylvia, do you want—him—so much?" she asked in a low, shaken voice.

"Oh, so much! More than s-salvation!" sobbed the other.

"And would you be—good to him?"

The other Sylvia lifted her puckered face from the shelter of her handkerchief.

"Oh, I would be good—as good as the innocent child angels in heaven!" she cried.

"Sylvia, *mignonne*, you do not know how good I can be! I am better—far, far better—than when you saw me last. Oh,

chérie, if you will give me my two little weeks, I promise you that never has there been, never will there be, any goodness like my goodness!"

She searched Sylvia's face, and, as she saw it softening, hope gleamed vividly through the disarray of her beauty. Hastily she dabbed her eyes dry.

"Darling, you will let me? You will give me my chance? You will! Oh, you are a jewel—my jewel, all the jewels I need—like the good Cornelia!"

She clapped her hands ecstatically; and all at once the years were lifted as swiftly as they had come down, and she was again a girl—a slightly damaged girl, and yet indubitably the younger of the two.

Sylvia had seen this phenomenon a dozen times, yet somehow it always vanquished her. This was the *Peter Pan* of mothers, the child who would never grow up—her child, her selfish, spoiled, beloved child, who must at any price be made happy. Her heart felt weighted down with all the tragic wreckage of doomsday—the dead hopes, the ruined loves; but she did not hesitate.

"Very well," she said. "I'll stay away. I wish you joy, Sylvia."

"Oh, I shall have joy, if you do not have objections!" returned the other gayly, fishing a vanity box from her bag and repairing the ravages of her tears. "Thank you, darling! You are the one good angel in a wicked world. If only you cared a little more about your looks, you would be simply perfect!"

The elevator door clicked, a man went out to the street, and, reminded of the passage of time, by tacit consent they followed. Outside on the pavement they stopped and looked at each other again.

"I must be going on," said the other Sylvia. "*Au 'voir*, darling!"

"I don't know when we shall meet again," said Sylvia somberly.

"Where are you staying, *chère enfant*?"

"I'm rooming on Lexington Avenue, and working as a waitress in the restaurant where you had tea yesterday."

"Oh, my dear child! How—how *déclassant*!"

"I wanted to live," said Sylvia dryly; "and I wanted to be where I could keep an eye on you. I shan't be there much longer."

"No, you will be coming to the kind Anne's roof, which is really very comfort-

able. I will make haste and finish my little affair, so as to leave a clear field for you."

She turned to go.

"I think I won't take it, now," said Sylvia in a low voice. "You—you *will* be good to Keith?"

"Why, I will try not to let him get lost, or damaged by fire, water, or moths," laughed the other, over her shoulder. "I promise that he will be delivered to you in good condition, when you call for him at the end of the two weeks. Adieu, *chérie*!"

She kissed her fingers and walked away, buoyant and debonair as ever, down the street. Sylvia stood staring after her.

"Now what did she mean by that?" she asked herself.

She felt completely at sea. Her renunciation had been so sincere, the intention to disappear entirely from her old world had been shaping so definitely within her, that she seemed incapable of taking in any other idea; yet there certainly was something in the other Sylvia's mind which was not in hers, and somehow that something held out a little twinkling beacon of hope for her.

The dark thoughts that had been hovering near since her decision—thoughts of disappearance and despair, thoughts even of death—were penetrated by a new light. She walked slowly back to the tea room, and, in a brown study, hung up her hat and coat and put on her cap and apron again.

"Well!" said Miss Weissmann, pussy-footing brightly up to her as she returned to the post of duty. "I didn't know but you'd gone off with your swell relation. Going to stay with us a while longer, are you?"

"Two weeks," answered Sylvia.

IX

THE thick haze of uncertainty, pierced by far-away gleams of hope, still surrounded Sylvia the next day. She was moving absent-mindedly through it, tidying her table after the sparse breakfast custom had ceased, when she was called back to actuality by an exclamation from Gladys:

"My Gawd! Look who's here!"

Sylvia followed the blond damsel's glance, and saw, to her astonishment, the other Sylvia coming in at the door. She looked as vivid and distinguished as ever, but beneath her beautiful smooth surface she showed a subtle perturbation. In her

hand she carried a traveling bag. The staff of "Ye Topaz Tea Shoppe" stopped work, to a woman, and stared open-mouthed.

The dazzling visitor hurried to Sylvia's side, and asked, in a tense undertone:

"Is there a spot in this wild-eyed zoo where two civilized women may find a moment's privacy?"

Sylvia piloted her to the waitresses' cloak room, and closed the door—the round eyes swiveling after them to the last crack. The other Sylvia set down the traveling bag, and drew a long breath.

"What's the matter?" asked Sylvia. "Are you going on a journey?"

"Not yet—oh, no!" laughed the other, gayly, but a trifle nervously. "You are, *chérie*—not on a journey, but just a little jaunt. Here is a summons that came to me on my breakfast tray." She fished in her little hand bag, explaining rapidly as she did so. "I opened it. As you know, people often take me for you, and then they naturally address me by your name; but you will see that it is yours. Here!"

Sylvia opened the letter. It was typewritten on business stationery with the letterhead "Cunningham & Frasier," and was so brief as almost to be witty.

DEAR MRS. ORLOFF:

Please come to my office to-morrow morning, the 23rd. I need your signature. I shall expect you at ten o'clock.

Yours truly,

ABNER J. CUNNINGHAM.

"Why, that's a strange letter!" said Sylvia, puzzled. "Cunningham & Frasier were father's lawyers, but I finished up all my affairs with them before I went abroad. It was Mr. Frasier I dealt with, anyway. Why should Mr. Cunningham be writing to me, and in such a peremptory tone?"

"Ah, you notice that!" exclaimed the other triumphantly. "Boorish, is it not? A man without finesse—a rhinoceros! But you see he wants you to sign your name, and you will, will you not?"

"I don't see what he can want me to sign it to. I haven't a shred of property left. It can't be anything but some silly legal form."

"Yes, yes—that must be it; but legal forms must be complied with. There is some dreadful name they call you if you do not—contempt of court, or habeas corpus, or something. You will go, darling?"

"Well, it's the slack time now. I suppose I could get off. Yes, I'll go."

"Oh, that is my little blue angel!" The other Sylvia flung open her traveling bag, and began pulling things rapidly out of it. "Have no fear of the zoo keeper. I will make all right with her. Now hurry and get ready!"

"What on earth is the wardrobe for?" inquired Sylvia, gazing in astonishment.

"To make you fit to be seen, of course! If I am to be taken for you, I cannot have you going about looking like a bread pudding. I have brought some of my clothes—a frock, coat, hat, shoes, gloves—enough for one Christian ensemble. Hop into them quickly, or you will be late!"

Sylvia complied without demur, aware that the shabby garments in which she came to work would reflect little credit on her family's provision for her. The other Sylvia had brought her a charming outfit in brown, which beautifully set off her clear brunette coloring. She put it on with increasing pleasure, pulled and patted her hair into a more worldly-wise arrangement, and set the brown hat with its bright orange ornament niftily askew, without being told to. A snappy dresser had been lost when the Designer of Destinies decided to make Sylvia a blessed damozel.

When she had finished, the other Sylvia touched her pale cheeks with rouge, pearled her over with the clinging powder whose scent she remembered so well, and drew a lip stick along the outline of her curved mouth. Sylvia, looking at herself in the small mirror over the waitresses' washstand, was dumfounded. She looked five years younger and ten years more devilish.

"Voilà!" said the other Sylvia, regarding her critically. "I think you will do. *Dieu*, what an improvement! You will have much to answer for at the bar of judgment, my dear, wasting your natural advantages the way you do. Come, let us make haste!"

The eyes of the staff threatened to pop out as the two reappeared, perfect peers in distinction and beauty, and Miss Weissmann desired nothing better than to grant them any favor they could ask. She wanted very much to detain them in conversation, on a social basis; but the other Sylvia slipped through with her wily graciousness, and in a minute they were outside.

"Now," said the other Sylvia, as they stood waiting for a taxi, "you have nothing to do, darling, you understand, but to whisk in, sign your name, and whisk out

again. Do not stay to talk to this man Cunningham. He is a bear—he will bite you. You will not need to say a thing but how-do-you-do and good-by; but when you say that, say it as I do. He has met me, and he knows I do not talk the adenoidal American mumble."

"Very well," agreed Sylvia indulgently.

"And one thing more—if you have anything to say to me, never at any time say it over the telephone. I am sure that stuffed alligator of a butler listens; and these last few days he has looked at me very oddly. Do not speak to me at all unless an emergency emerges, and then speak only to arrange a meeting somewhere. It is confusing for our *entourage* that there should be two of us. Let us, in consideration, confuse them as little as possible."

Sylvia burst out laughing.

"Oh, you are a priceless child!" she said.

"And you a sage old mamma. Now, here is the taxi. Go, and God go with you!"

The other blew one of her light kisses and turned quickly away; and Sylvia was off on her errand.

At the offices of Cunningham & Frasier she found herself expected, and was ushered into the senior partner's sanctum without delay. Abner Cunningham rose to greet her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Orloff," he said, with a slightly sardonic emphasis on the name. "Sorry to bother you, but—er—a matter arose which made me need to get your signature. Sit down here, please, and oblige me by putting it on this paper."

He laid a sheet of foolscap and a pen on the desk. Sylvia took the chair he indicated, and began unfastening her gloves.

"But," she said, surprised, yet remembering to speak with the other Sylvia's crispness, "this paper is blank! Have you given me the wrong one, Mr. Cunningham?"

"No," said the lawyer, "that's the right one. Write 'Sylvia Schuyler' on it twenty times."

"Twenty!" laughed Sylvia. "Have I gone back to school? And my legal surname is Orloff."

"Do as I tell you!" snapped Abner Cunningham. "No quibbling, please!"

Sylvia raised her eyebrows. These were strange manners for one so customarily urbane as a family lawyer. However, she

drew off her borrowed gloves without comment, and began writing "Sylvia Schuyler," rapidly, on one line after another down the paper.

Abner Cunningham watched her.

"You've improved," he remarked ironically. "You do it faster than you did."

Then his eyes traveled from her fingers to her wrist, and narrowed to sharp attention.

"Sylvia!" he exclaimed, in a voice shaken out of its usual dry impassiveness. "What about your bracelets?"

Sylvia raised her head in surprise.

"Why, I never wear bracelets," she answered.

"You never wear bracelets! Then what about the other day, when you refused to take them off?"

Sylvia's mind jumped. There was more in this than met the eye, then; but what could it be?

"Oh, that!" she shrugged, imitating the other Sylvia to admiration. "Do you know women so little, *m'sieu'*, that you expect them to explain their whims by a textbook of logic?"

As she spoke, without knowing exactly why she did it, she moved her hand quickly to her lap, where he could not see it. Cunningham's eyes, following the movement, snapped.

"Show me your wrist," he commanded.

"Why?" countered Sylvia. "What is my wrist to you?"

His mouth set in a hard line, and he reached into his breast pocket for a packet of folded papers.

"It is this to me, madam," he said sternly. "After you left the other day, having made the same refusal, I asked my partner for the documents that you—that Sylvia Schuyler—signed five years ago. I took those signatures and the one you made that day to a handwriting expert, and asked for his opinion; and I'm now in a position, if you insist on brazening this thing out, to be able to arrest you for forgery."

Sylvia's brain raced. Old signatures—a signature the other day—the wrist, the bracelets! She had never noticed anything about a wrist. The other Sylvia arrested for forgery! She must avert that at any cost.

She would go very warily until she could find what this was all about. She drew on her gloves and fastened them, underneath the desk.

"May I trouble you," she said, "to show me on what your expert friend bases his opinion?"

The lawyer's eyes shot a spark of triumph from under his black brows.

"On this," he said, spreading out his papers. "Here are the signatures of five years ago. Here's that of last week. At first glance they look exactly alike—clever, I grant you; but the expert pointed out a trick that you missed. Each capital S of the old ones has a little doubled-back stroke that joins it to the next letter. Each of yours is detached. It's a difference that nobody but an expert would be likely to notice, but, as it turns out, it's a mighty important one!"

Sylvia drew the papers to her and affected to study them. She felt the lawyer's eyes on her wrist, but gave no sign. The old protective instinct was at work, and she was guarding her child.

In a moment she raised her limpid eyes to his.

"Now isn't that odd!" she said, twitching the papers around toward him. "I should have said—perhaps I'm a poor observer—that those five-year-old ones and these I've just made were identical."

Abner Cunningham drew the sheets under his nose, put on his glasses, and scrutinized them. Then he took off his glasses, put on a pair of spectacles, and scrutinized them again. Finally he got a magnifying glass out of a drawer and scowled through it with fierce attention. When, at last, he gave in and looked up, his face was comically blank with bewilderment.

"Well—I'll—be—jiggered!" he gasped.

Sylvia rose, smiling calmly.

"You see?" she said, with a little shrug. "I should advise you not to excite yourself unduly over trifles, *m'sieu'*. It leads to apoplexy."

She turned superbly toward the door. The other Sylvia could not have done it better.

Abner Cunningham stared at her, blinking. For a moment he seemed deprived of the power of speech, but before she turned the handle he recovered himself a little.

"You're very clever, madam," he said; "but we're not done yet. I told you my investigation was going to take two weeks, at least; but by good luck I caught an agent of ours in Vienna, and I shall get a cable from him any minute now. When

we see what he has to offer, we'll see how much your cleverness will do for you."

Sylvia gave him a little mocking wave of the hand.

"I will let you enjoy the last word," she said. "It always seems such a solace to those of your sex."

And, leaving him inarticulate with exasperation, she closed the door behind her.

She kept her serene, detached expression until she was well away from the lawyer's office, for she had no intention of adding to the other Sylvia's danger, whatever it might be, by admitting it; but inwardly she was consumed by anxiety. What *had* the supplanter been up to now?

As quickly as possible she made her way to a public telephone, and called Anne's house. Of course, following the unfailing custom of the telephone in times of dire need, it responded with a wrong number, the wronged person's indignant disclaimer, and the operator's honeyed "Excuse it, please!"

She made the call again, giving the right number with desperate insistence; and this time she was answered by the exasperating sound of the "busy" signal. When, after minutes that seemed like hours, she finally succeeded in getting the call put through, and heard Johnson's solemn voice at the other ends, she was rigid with anxiety and suspense.

"Let me speak to Mme. Orloff, please, as quickly as possible!" she said urgently.

"Mme. Orloff is not at-home, madam," returned the solemn voice.

"Oh!" cried Sylvia. "Is she—can you tell me where I could reach her?"

"No, madam. She has drove into the country for the day."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sylvia again. "Are you *sure* it's for the *whole* day?"

"Yes, madam. She specified particular that she would not be at-home until late to-night."

Another fear caught at Sylvia's heart.

"Could—could you tell me who she went with?"

"Yes, madam—with Mr. Ludlow."

Sylvia hung up the receiver with trembling haste, for fear it should drop from her nerveless fingers. She quivered from head to foot. This was a game, then—a game to get her out of the way, to involve her in whatever trouble the other had managed to get into, and to swallow up Keith covertly and without warning.

"I might have known," she thought bitterly, "that when she was out for happiness, there wouldn't be anything but trouble left for me. Sylvia is the go-getter of the family."

Her heart hardened. Very well, she told herself, they could all take their course. The other Sylvia could go to jail, Keith could go to the other Sylvia, and she herself could go—to the river.

"I'm *through*!" she said aloud fiercely.

Yet, even as she said it, she knew it was not true. So long as there was even a chance that either of those others needed her, she must stay near at hand. So, when she dragged herself wearily out of the booth, she did not go to the river. She went back to "Ye Topaz Tea Shoppe," and the omelets, and the tea with lemon.

X

TENSE with anxiety and impatience, Sylvia forced herself to wait until an hour in the morning when she thought it might be possible to reach her supplanter, and then called up the Schuyler house; but Johnson replied, with a note of austere rebuke, that Mme. Orloff had been out late, and had left word that she was not to be disturbed for any occasion before she rang her bell.

Sylvia wrung her hands with impatience. The danger grew greater and nearer every moment, and the other must be warned at once. If there were no indirect approach, then direct methods were called for. She telephoned the tea shop that she would not report for duty that morning, dressed carefully in the other Sylvia's clothes, touched her cheeks and lips with color which she bought at the corner druggist's, and went to Anne's house.

Once more, on admitting her, the butler's lack of expression was critically endangered—so much so, indeed, that she felt obliged to offer up a fib on the altar of his professional honor, and murmured that she had been out to early church. This had a still more disastrous effect than his first surprise. He looked as if his enamel must certainly crack somewhere, and let out a yelp of consternation. Sylvia watched him apprehensively until the journey in the lift was finished, and left him hastily.

Not daring to knock for fear of observant menials, she entered the sitting room quickly, and locked the door behind her, to guard against interruption. In the inner room she found the other Sylvia still asleep.

She called her by name; and the other swore softly and prettily in French, and told her to go away.

"Wake up!" said Sylvia. "You *must!* It's enormously important."

The other sat up in bed, blinking and tumbled, but pretty still, even at this most cruel hour of the day.

"Sylvia!" she exclaimed. "Two of us—here! This is criminal folly!"

"You're hardly the one to talk about criminal folly," said Sylvia impatiently. "What have you been trying to do to this man Cunningham? What is it you signed my name to?"

The other Sylvia turned ghastly pale.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Oh, it is nothing—nothing at all! I can explain, Sylvia. He—I—he thought I was you, do you see?—and I thought I would play a little joke on him, and—and so I pretended to write your name, just for a joke. That is it—just a little joke. You know my habit, *toujours gai.*"

She pushed back her soft, tousled hair, and wiped her forehead.

"What I can't make out," said Sylvia, thinking aloud, "is what you thought you'd get by it. It can't be the house, because I sold that before I went. It can't be those bonds that father left me, because you got them long ago. It seems to me you must be trying to find some legal way to make this deception permanent—to get yourself incorporated into me, somehow, so that you can go on living here forever."

"I—here forever? Oh, good God forbid!" cried the other Sylvia spontaneously.

"Then what in the world *is* it? You won't get it, anyway. He had me write my name, and told me that yours was a forgery. He has an agent tracing me in Vienna. Your game's up, Sylvia."

Suddenly and with complete abandon, the other Sylvia burst into tears.

"Oh, it is too cruel!" she cried. "When I almost had it! Oh, and I am so *sick* of this place! So wishing to get away! You would never have missed it, you did not know it existed, and I need it so cruelly! Oh, oh!"

"If you don't tell me what it is," said Sylvia sternly, "I'll let him arrest you."

"Oh, it is something your mean, stingy, curmudgeon old father—tried to take away from me—from his own—former—wife—the brutal beast!" wept the other Sylvia stormily. "A million—dollars!"

Her voice rose to a wail on the last word. Sylvia stood staring, her face cleared of everything but astonishment.

"Money!" she exclaimed. "You were trying to get *money?*"

"You—you did not—want it," sobbed the other. "You n-never knew how to appreciate it—and if I had not gone away when I did—there w-would not have been any l-left for you, anyway!"

"Why didn't you *tell* me it was only money?" cried Sylvia. "I thought you wanted Keith!"

It was the other's turn to be amazed. She lifted her puckered, middle-aged face, and stopped sobbing.

"Keith!" she repeated. "Keith Ludlow? That cold pancake? I throw him in the garbage can! Sylvia—Sylvia *darling*—do you mean you would let me *have* the money?"

"You shall have every penny I ever hope to possess," returned Sylvia, "if you'll only go away and let me have my man!"

There were a scramble and a rush, and the other Sylvia was out of bed, pattering on bare feet to fling herself at her benefactress in a rapturous embrace. The miracle had happened again, and once more she was a girl.

"Oh, *mon ange!*" she cried. "*Mon chou, mon petit lapin bleu!* For a million dollars I will go to the moon, I will live in the back yard of Saturn! Oh, if all children were like you, parenthood would not be the justly unpopular profession it now is! Come, darling, let us go and get it!"

She wiped her eyes, kissed her daughter, and snatched up the rosy silken garments that lay on her dressing chair.

Sylvia laughed. She could no more be angry with this artless criminal than she could be with a baby for breaking a set of Chinese commandments; and her own heart was like a bubble in the sun.

"It's true we'd better get it while the getting is good," she said, "or his investigation may stop us; but I should hardly think that for both of us to go was the surest way."

"Oh, dear, you are right," admitted the other. "Abner is such a suspicious old sniffer, he would be sure to disapprove; but he has insulted me so, with his horrid insinuations that I was not you, that I *should* enjoy putting him in his place!"

Sylvia laughed again.

"Better keep yourself in yours, until we finish this. The butler let me in, and very likely he or some one else will see me go out, so you must lie absolutely low while I'm gone."

"Right again, darling! You are always right. I can do it easily, for I left word that they were not to disturb me, and I will keep my door locked. See, I will give you my latchkey. You will slip in, I will slip out, and all will go on as before, only with a change of Sylvias. And I will reward you. I will have your Keith here for tea with you this afternoon. There!"

"Thank you, dear. I was afraid yesterday that you were never going to let me see him again. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"And meantime I shall be happily employed planning how to spend my million dollars. Bring it in gold, if you can, *chérie*, and for God's sake do not let the holding-up men get you!"

On her way to the lawyer's Sylvia summed up the situation to herself.

"The agent's in Vienna now. If he inquires at the American consulate and the American Express office, he'll hear that I'm dead. If he cables that, this Cunningham certainly won't give me the money without a terrible lot of identification and red tape. But if he goes to the Near East headquarters, he'll find that I came to life again long after she got here; and if he cables *that*, there'll be twice as much fuss. If she's to go soon—if I'm to save a scandal, keep Jerry for Anne, and get my Keith—I'll have to collect it before he hears anything at all. I must hurry!"

Abner Cunningham greeted her with a certain dry avidity. Evidently she had occupied a front seat in his thoughts since they parted.

"Well, Mrs.—er—Orloff! So you thought you wouldn't give me the last word, after all?"

"I could not, Mr. Cunningham. Mother Eve asserted herself. Did you take my signature to your expert?"

"Well, yes, I did; and, to tell the truth he—er—he says it's perfectly satisfactory."

"Indeed! That teaches us—*n'est-ce pas?*—to put not our trust in the legs of a horse, or the notions of an expert."

"H-m—maybe. All the same, if you don't mind, I'd like to look at your wrist, Mrs.—er—Orloff."

The lawyer's shrewd eyes narrowed, boring into her. She met his scrutiny with the wide, innocent gaze of a child.

"Certainly, Mr. Cunningham, if it is of such great interest to you." Stripping off her glove and holding out her smooth wrist, she added, with an excellent imitation of the other Sylvia's impishness: "I thought I was coming to a lawyer, not a manicure!"

He reddened at the gibe; and his discomfort increased as, turn the wrist and peer at it as he would, he could find no mark. At last he let her hand fall—the other Sylvia, she reflected, would have squeezed his before parting from it; but that was more effrontery than she could manage—and sat scowling at the desk and breathing heavily, his asthma aggravated by exasperation. Poor man, he was only too well aware that he was being tricked, yet he could not for the life of him see how.

"As long as you have no more use for my wrist," said Sylvia sweetly, "would you mind letting me take my money and go? I am in rather a hurry."

He transferred his exasperated glance to her face.

"I'd rather you stayed a little while. I'm expecting word from my agent at any minute."

"But what is that to me? Your agent is in Europe, chasing wild geese. I am here, waiting for my money."

Abner Cunningham leaned toward her across the desk, looking very stern.

"Knowing the penalty of perjury, and the impossibility of your escaping detection in it, are you prepared to take your oath that you are Sylvia Schuyler Orloff?" he demanded.

"I am. I will swear it by the bones of the Prophet, or the beard of the notary public, or whatever you say is binding. My handwriting proves it. My cousin and my friends will vouch for it. Your own eyesight will tell you it is true."

She looked at him without blinking. After a pause, and grudgingly, he withdrew his eyes from her and turned to the row of drawers at the side of his desk. From one of them he drew out the brown folder, and proceeded to disclose the red-sealed papers, the papers with the crinkly edges, the pale green papers, the brown bank books.

"Before I give this into your hands," he said, very disagreeably, "I must remind you that I hold your written pledge not to give any portion of it to your mother."

Sylvia experienced an unpleasant shock. This was news to her, and she lacked the other Sylvia's easy adaptability in the matter of oaths; but a moment's reflection made it clear to her that the pledge must be the questionable document which had aroused the disfavor of the expert. Certainly a forgery couldn't be binding; so she nodded equably.

"Very well," said the lawyer, with a touch of grimness. "Now, some of this is in mortgages, some in stocks, some in government bonds. A little is in cash, where interest came in recently and I waited until your return to invest it. The amount left by your father, as you know, was one million dollars. That was twenty years ago, and, as I'm happy to say I never lost a penny of it by bad investment, the total is now more than two millions. If you wish me to go on handling it, I will do so, out of regard for your father; but if you want to make a change, you're welcome to do so. I must admit that you remind me too much of your mother for me really to enjoy your society."

"The lack of enjoyment is mutual, Mr. Cunningham," said Sylvia candidly. "I think I would rather take it and go. If you have a piece of paper to wrap it up in—"

"My dear madam, it isn't a pound of prunes!" exclaimed the lawyer irritably. "I told you the other day that these things take time. To-day I can't do any more than give you an accounting, explain the investments, and show you how to realize, if you wish to do so. Getting the money will come later."

He cleared a space on his desk and prepared to spread out the papers; but before he had taken them from the folder there was a knock at the door, and he turned to bark:

"Come in!"

As the door opened, Sylvia saw his expression change from grimness to alert expectancy. She glanced over her shoulder to ascertain the cause. In the aperture stood a telegraph messenger, with an open book and a yellow envelope.

"Cable for Mr. Cunnin'ham," said the youth, with laborious distinctness. "It's marked 'personal'—you got to sign for it yerself."

Abner Cunningham rose in a hurry.

"Now we shall see!" he remarked to Sylvia, with ill suppressed triumph, and

hastened to meet the messenger in the doorway. "Where do I sign?"

Sylvia thought, in the direct and simple fashion that characterizes the thought of women on financial matters. This money is mine, she thought. I want it. I want it now. When he reads that cable, Mr. Cunningham won't let me have it. Very well—the thing to do is to take it before he can stop me.

She glanced around again. Abner Cunningham, seeking in the tangled maze of signatures the one clear space which destiny had set apart for him, had joined the messenger outside the door, where the light was better. His head was bent, his back was toward her. She leaned across the desk, gathered up the brown folder and its inclosures, and tucked it under her arm. Then, swiftly and without ostentation, she slipped out of the room.

Fortune favored her. When the lawyer raised his head at the light sound of her passing, he glanced first in the wrong direction, and she was through the outer door before he could discover her. When she reached the corridor, she caught a descending elevator in the very act. She thought she heard a muffled voice crying her name, and perhaps a "Stop!" or two; but she did not pause for investigation. She ran out of the door like a hare preceding hungry hounds, and jumped into a waiting taxi.

"Drive to the nearest bank," she cried, "and do it quick, quick, quick!"

XI

It was a sadder and a wiser Sylvia who turned her weary face homeward at four o'clock that afternoon.

She had shared the other Sylvia's artless impression that all you had to do, to collect an inheritance, was to call at a bank and ask for it. Her only doubt had been as to whether she ought to stop and buy a bag to carry it home in. This she had set aside, with the conclusion that they certainly had bags for such purposes at the bank—possibly those canton flannel ones that jewelers send silver dishes in, or at least ticking or burlap. When she jumped out and hurried to the revolving door, she had called to the taxi driver to wait.

Now, at four o'clock, she had set up a record in long-distance futility that would shame a grasshopper. She had journeyed from turnstile to turnstile, from

bank to broker, from broker to bank again. She had accumulated a cab bill of nine dollars and seventy cents—mostly those dimes that tick relentlessly on, like the clock of fate, while you wait—and she had worn out her patience and her optimism, to say nothing of the other Sylvia's sheer silk stockings.

She had found that those papers represented real estate, which could not be sold for months. Some of the mortgages would not come due for years. Even the bonds, it seemed, could only be sold through a broker. When the banks closed, she still had most of her brown bundle under her arm.

However, her efforts had not been wholly fruitless. The cash of which the lawyer spoke had been deposited in the bank where her family had always kept their accounts. Her signature was still on file, and there was even a teller extant who remembered her. This money she collected with little difficulty, and a very neat haul it proved—more than five thousand dollars. Her hand bag bulged with it.

She clutched her spoil tightly as she got into the taxi for the last time. If the driver didn't turn out to be a "holding-up man," she could at least get the other Sylvia away. How to do this was the next question, and she considered it wearily and anxiously as the taxi dodged through the traffic.

She had counted on returning during the forenoon, when the house was comparatively deserted; but now it was tea time. Anne would probably have come home, as usual. Jerry would very likely be seeking what the newspapers call "heart balm" with her. Darling Keith would be coming. The butler would be on duty in the hall. The possible complications were many.

The danger from Abner Cunningham increased with every moment; and she *must* preserve the other Sylvia from detection, at any cost. She must get upstairs instantly and set the prisoner free, and then get down again and distract everybody's attention until her escape was assured.

She got out of the cab without robbery—unless you count the bill—and opened the door with the other Sylvia's latchkey. Johnson's back was visible, proceeding majestically toward the unobtrusive chair in the rear of the hall where he was wont to park it while lying in wait for callers. Something in its air of satisfied achieve-

ment suggested that he had just admitted a visitor, and Sylvia looked about her uneasily. Voices were murmuring in the drawing-room, but there was no one in sight, and she began to steal toward the stairs as swiftly and silently as possible.

However, when she came to the door of the morning room, there was a step inside, and a voice called her name:

"Sylvia!"

She turned involuntarily. That voice would have sidetracked her on the way to heaven. Sure enough, it was Keith, standing in the doorway and looking at her wistfully, longingly, yet without any eagerness. The other Sylvia must have been atrocious to him yesterday, she thought fleetingly, to set him so many miles away after that moment of perfect nearness at the movies.

"Wait a minute for me, dearest," she said, "and I'll be with you."

For an instant his face showed startled incredulity; then joy flooded it with a rush. Quick as she was, he was quicker. Before she had taken two steps toward the stairs he was upon her.

"Sylvia, Sylvia!" he cried exultantly. "I've got you at last!"

At the sound of his triumphant exclamation the murmur in the drawing-room ceased. At the moment when Keith was silencing Sylvia's protest with the most effectual gag known to human experience, Jerry's voice—suppressed, but vibrant with strong feeling—could be distinctly heard.

"Damn it, Anne!" it said fretfully. "Sylvia's here!"

Sylvia heroically struggled free, with a little sputter of laughter.

"She won't be here long, Jerry!" she called. "It's a mistake—excuse it, please! Keith, let me pass, darling. I'll be back in a jiffy."

But Keith refused to let her go so easily, and in the moment of delay Anne came to the drawing-room door.

"Oh, don't go, Sylvia!" she protested remorsefully. "Come on in! Come in, Keith! Polly'll put the kettle on, and we'll all have tea."

Sylvia was thinking frantically. If they could all be preoccupied with tea, if she could find an errand to keep Johnson in the kitchen, the other Sylvia could be out in five minutes; but she must get upstairs at once, and they must not suspect her. She made a determined effort to speak naturally. ●

"Trot along, all of you, and have your tea," she said. "Anne and Jerry, go back to your scandals. I don't want you any more than you want me. Keith, wait for me in the morning room, will you, while I go up and take off my hat?"

"Oh, Sylvia!" reproached Keith. "When I've waited so long to see you! Leave your hat on, and stay here."

"I won't be two minutes. *Do* go into the morning room, Keith! Anne, Jerry, *please* go back where you came from!"

In spite of her effort to be natural, there was in her voice an underlying tension of nervous insistence that had the effect of awakening in the others the very interest in her movements that she wished to avoid. Moreover, they were all, consciously or unconsciously, aware of a difference in the quality of the Sylvia they had been accepting as their own. Anne looked at her questioningly, Keith broodingly, Jerry morosely; and none of them budged.

"She's up to something, I'll wager a lead doughnut!" said Jerry disagreeably. "What are you going to do, Sylvia—seduce Johnson?"

Anne laughed.

"I know! Her great crush, Mr. Cunningham, has been calling her every fifteen minutes all day, and now he says he's coming here. She's going to keep a date with him."

"Sylvia," said Keith, "I thought we'd finished with tricks. I have, anyway. I can't stand any more!"

Sylvia could have wept with anxiety, fatigue, and exasperation. Cunningham on the war path, the other Sylvia beleaguered upstairs, a clear field absolutely necessary, and the lot of them standing around in the way like wooden Indians! She clenched her hands.

"Listen, dears," she said with desperate calm. "I'm not going anywhere in the world but to my room. I'll be back in two minutes. I don't want to run away from any of you—not even Jerry, who's so cross to me. Just trust me, and sit down and wait for me where you'll be comfortable. Please, please!"

She held herself tense for their response. She did not dare to go until they did.

But before the answer came, there was a new development. Johnson had emerged from his hinterland with the tea tray, and was advancing ceremoniously along the hall. As he came abreast of the elevator, some

one stepped out of it and emitted a rapturous exclamation:

"Tea!"

"Yes, madam," admitted Johnson, with some hauteur.

The new arrival advanced as he did, with eyes glued to the tray; and they converged just in front of the drawing-room door.

There was the sound of a gasp—whether from herself alone, or from the whole group in unison, Sylvia could not have told. It was followed by a crash. Johnson had dropped the tea tray. This marked the nadir of his professional career, and it is not surprising that he gave notice next day.

There was a moment of paralyzed silence, during which every one stared at the apparition.

"My God!" ejaculated Jerry. "I'm seeing double!"

"Oh!" wailed Sylvia, recovering her voice. "Why did you do it? Why did you *do* it, Sylvia? Now everything's lost!"

"But I was so hun-gree!" protested the other Sylvia plaintively. "All day with no food, and you did not come and did not come! I could not wait any longer. What use is a million dollars to a corpse? Ah!"

She pounced on a crumpet that protruded from the wreckage, and devoured it greedily. An ecstatic smile overspread her beautiful face.

"Ah!" she exclaimed again, joyfully, diving for another prize. "All is lost, you say? By no means, *chérie!* Look at what I have found!"

Sylvia burst into helpless laughter. Among all these righteous persons, the deceiver, the criminal whose escape from the penalty of her crimes she was trying to assure, was the only one completely at peace with the world.

"There's nobody like you—nobody!" she choked.

"But—but who *is* she?" gasped Anne.

"Yes, who is she?" demanded Keith.

"Are there two of you?"

"Why, don't you know?" cried Sylvia.

"She's my—"

The other Sylvia interrupted with a swift, pretty gesture.

"Ah, do not say it!" she coaxed. "Do not name the ugly, elderly word! Say she is just another Sylvia, who dropped in for a moment, and must now be moving on. Ah—did you get it, *chérie?*"

"Enough to start you," said Sylvia, showing the fat bag.

"Oh, *Dieu merci!*" cried the other, seizing it joyfully. "Darling ducats, darling daughter! Now I know that my life, with all its labors and trials, has not been in vain. I think I will be going, dear one; I listened in every time the kind Anne answered the outrageous Abner, and something tells me it is time. Give me that hat, and the coat, and the gloves. Pick me up another bun, Jerree. I am on my way!"

"Where are you going?" asked Sylvia, delivering up the garments.

"Who knows?" laughed the other, putting them on. "To Paris, to Adolph, to the end of the rainbow—anywhere I go will be paradise now. You will not forget to send the reinforcements of manna when they come? *Au revoir*, my dears—no, good-by, for I am never coming back!"

She blew them all a butterfly kiss and ran out of the door.

Johnson slowly picked up the wreckage of the tea tray, and walked away, a broken man.

Jerry drew a long breath, like one coming out of a trance.

"Who the deuce is Sylvia, anyway?" he demanded.

Everybody started to answer him at once—Sylvia with explanations, Keith with a shameless demonstration of his own blissful certainty, Anne with amazed murmurings; but the other Sylvia—who, unable to resist her curtain call, was not as far off as they had supposed—popped her head inside the door again, and spoke first.

"Ah, you wish to know!" she cried. "Sylvia—this Sylvia—is the spirit of all that you thank God you are not, and wish to God you were. Going now—going from you—gone! How happy you will be without me, *chers enfants*—and how dull!"

THE END

TO ONE ACROSS THE SEA

I SEND this song to you across the sea.
Here in this land of dreams called Italy
The memory of you is like a song
Through all the golden hours, as sweet as strong.
I hear your voice in dulcet melodies
Borne by the sea-tinged, blossom-scented breeze—
Your voice and the low whisper of the sea,
A minor chord of matchless harmony;
And in the multitudes that come and go,
Your face and yours alone I see, aglow
As on that magical remembered day
On a bright sea, under the sky of May.

I send this song to you across the sea
From this fair land of dreams, your Italy!

Lena Whittaker Blakeney

Established 1860

Demand and get
the genuine

WINDOW
SHADE
FABRICS

Hartshorn
SHADE
ROLLERS